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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The Recovery of Meaning: William of Ockham and the Plays of the Wakefield Master

BY

Robert Nicholas Wiznura

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

IN

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Robert Wiznura

6990 Lancaster Street
Vancouver, BC
V5S 3B2

29 July 1992.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommentd to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled, The Recovery of Meaning: William of Ockham and the Plays of the Wakefield Master, submitted by Robert Nicholas Wiznura in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

G. Epp, PhD, Assistant Professor

P. Demers, PhD, Professor

F. Landy, PhD, Associate Professor

29 July 1992

Abstract

Literature constitutes its own reality through language, which in turn reflects a larger, extramental reality. In the plays of the Wakefield Master, the question arises as to whether the world that language creates accurately reflects the world, or whether language lures the audience into the wilderness of the conceptual only to abandon us to our intramental realities.

This thesis focusses on the relationships between language, the user of language, and the extramental object in the philosophy of William of Ockham and the plays of the Wakefield Master. After a preliminary discussion of universals, I examine Ockham's distinction between mental and conventional language, and his theory of *suppositio*. I also explore the mind's relationship with the mind-independent object, and Ockham's belief that God can cause evident consent of a non-existent object. Ockham's approach is generally from the object through to the concept and then to spoken or written language. The Wakefield Master focusses particularly on the distinction between conventional and mental language and the discrepancy between word and thing.

The main body of the work falls into four sections. Three of these sections, delving into the way the Wakefield Master plays with the gap between apprehension and the articulation of that apprehension, explore the distinctions

between language and the world. The final section is devoted to the redemption of language or the transubstantiation of language by the Divine, the divine *fiat* that restores the link between language and the world.

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Abbreviations of Ockham's Writings

Expos. Periherm.--Expositio in librum Perihermenias Aristotelis.

Expos. Physicorum--Expositio in libros Physicorum

Ord.--Ordinatio

Quod.--Quodlibeta septem

SL--Summa Logicae

Introduction

Language and the Wakefield Master

Within Huntington MS. HM 1, the Towneley manuscript, is a group of plays attributed to a playwright known as the Wakefield Master.[1] The Wakefield Master's use of and apparent fascination with language has been noted by such scholars as Martin Stevens and Jeffrey Helterman, but little has been done in terms of examining the Wakefield Master's understanding of language. How does language work (or not work) for the Wakefield Master? In the confusion of language, where does meaning reside?

The issue of language in the Towneley plays has been forcefully raised by Martin Stevens in his 1977 article, "Language as Theme in the Wakefield Plays," and in its revised version "The Wakefield Cycle: The Playwright as Poet," from his 1987 book, Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations.[2] Stevens argues that the Towneley manuscript is notable for "its self-conscious interest in literary art as a medium, or

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[1]The plays attributed to the Wakefield Master and their locations in the manuscript are as follows: *Mactacio Abel*, 3*a*-7*a*; *Processus Noe cum filiis*, 7*b*-12*b*; *Prima Pastorum*, 32*b*-38*a*; *Secunda Pastorum*, 38*a*-46*b*; *Magnus Herodes*, 55*a*-60*a*; and the *Coliphizacio*, 73*b*-78*b* (Wakefield Pageants xvii). The Wakefield Master's writing also appears in other plays in the manuscript, the most notable being the *Judicium*, 122*a*-128*b* (Towneley Plays 367-87).

[2]I will quote from the latter as it is the more recent working of Stevens' position.

to put it in other terms, its concern with the uses and abuses of language" (156). Believing that the Wakefield Master was the guiding hand behind the entire "cycle," Stevens writes, "The essential premise of the Towneley cycle as a whole about language is that simplicity and artlessness mark the speech of the virtuous" (158).[3] To cite one example, Stevens argues that the *Mactacio Abel* is concerned with the abuse of language--the wicked say much while the virtuous say little (157)--and he follows a similar pattern through the rest of the Wakefield Master material, arguing that stillness and silence mark the virtuous, while words and noise mark the corrupt. However, Stevens tends to emphasize more the clashes between divine reality and contingent experience/appearance than language. Language, in his interpretation, becomes something of a medium of exchange about which he speaks little. Stevens concludes that the success of the Wakefield Master is something of a failure--

> The artist at his best has always been a rival of God; the Wakefield author knows that fact and fights to suppress his awesome challenge . . . . [I]n the play of the Great Doom he empirically passes judgement upon himself and leaves us to ponder the resonances of eternal salvation and damnation. (180)

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[3]In the chapter "The English mystery cycles" from Eckehard Simon's The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama, David Staines notes that Stevens, like others, refers to the "cycle" while referring almost exclusively to the Wakefield Master material (90).

Having pointed out that language is important for the Wakefield Master, Stevens interprets language as something of a temptation, a failure, a collapse of meaning.

Jeffrey Helterman, in his Symbolic Action in the Plays of the Wakefield Master, also draws attention to the role of language in his analysis of the *Coliphizacio*. He contrasts the silence of the Incarnate Word with the noise of his accusers. As he concludes,

> Christ's tormentors recognize him as Word on three levels, none of which corresponds to the truth. The torturers see him simply as a vibration in the air, a noise, and do not listen to him at all. Caiaphas listens and finds the Word incomprehensible nonsense, like the centaur or *hircocervus*. Annas, on the other hand, knows what Jesus means, but denies its validity, since the Word works by a logic alien to his own. For Annas, Jesus as Word is a lie, which, were it truth, would destroy his system of values. Not one of them understands that with the Incarnation, Word takes on a new meaning, since it becomes the new reality. (157)

Helterman draws his three distinctions of the Word (sound, existence and meaning)[4] from the conceptual realism/nominalism of Abelard, the twelfth-century philosopher. Abelard had attacked William of Champeaux's belief that universal terms, such as *dog* or *human*, refer to an ontologically real essence, present indifferently among the individuals of that species (Copleston, Medieval 81). Abelard instead argued that universality can only be

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[4]These distinctions can be said to correspond to the later distinctions of material supposition, personal supposition, and simple supposition of which more will be said later.

attributed to the logical content or meaning of a word (Copleston, Medieval 82). Thus, Abelard distinguished between the sound of a word, the signification of a word, and the logical content of a word. It is somewhat surprising that Helterman chooses the work of Abelard instead using the later, more prevalent theories of William of Ockham,[5] the fourteenth century British nominalist philosopher. Given that the plays date roughly between 1400-50 (Wakefield Pageants xxxi), the more prevalent theories of William of Ockham, who died in 1347, would appear to be more pertinent than those of Abelard, who died in 1142.

What is problematic about Helterman's position is that Annas both understands, but rejects, and misunderstands "the new reality." Helterman explicitly states that the Abelardian divisions are insufficient as they do not correspond to the truth. For Helterman, the Incarnate Word refers to and is the absolutely Real. The Abelardian nominalists of the play could not comprehend such a state of affairs as it falls out of their metaphysical scheme. The absolutely Real is a logical content and it does not make

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[5]To quote Frederick C. Copleston, "We have seen that in the first half of the fourteenth century Ockhamist influence tended to be concentrated at Oxford and Paris. But in the second half of the century it spread far and wide .... Some universities stuck to older traditions .... By and large, however, nominalism had extended itself pretty firmly in the universities of Europe by the end of the fourteenth century, in spite of occasional attacks ..." (Medieval 276).

sense that a Word can both refer to the Real and be the Real at one and the same time. Thus, Annas understands the concept but rejects its validity. When Helterman states that the Word "becomes the new reality," he is arguing that another non-Abelardian option is present which has been overlooked by the characters in the play. Some form of Realism would appear to be this other option. The Word, which is both human and divine, is both individual, a word, and universal, the paradigm of all language. It does not simply contain the logical content of the divine, it is the divine. Helterman's interpretation casts a shadow on the culpability of such stupid people. If "the new reality" falls out of their frame of reference and thought, how can they be held responsible for not recognizing it? If one removes Helterman's metaphysical fourth option, culpability is once again resting on the shoulders of Christ's accusers, which seems truer to the spirit of the play. To remove this fourth option, however, places the play into the very heart of the nominalist debate which rejects the ontological status of universals.

Kathleen M. Ashley, in her 1978 article "Divine Power in Chester Cycle and Late Medieval Thought," argues that nominalist theology is the guiding intellectual force behind another collection of medieval plays--the Chester cycle of plays. Her understanding of nominalism is restricted to Ockham's belief that "Whatever God produces by means of

secondary causes, He can directly produce and conserve immediately and without them" (*Quod.* 6, Q. 6; Boehner 25).[6] It should be noted that Ockham himself did not claim this doctrine as his own but states that it is "the famous maxim of the theologians" (*Quod.* 6, Q. 6; Boehner 25), and one that amounts simply to a claim that God is indeed omnipotent. Ockham's interpretations of its import might be startling, but Chester's are not; as Ashley herself points out, "The Chester plays stop short of . . . extreme nominalism . . ." (398). James R. Royse, in his 1979 article "Nominalism and Divine Power in the Chester Cycle," points out that what Ashley perceives as "nominalist" is often biblical, and one might add that, with Ashley's understanding of nominalism, Thomas a Kempis and John Milton would likely fall under the term. Ashley looks at one aspect of a theology divorced from its wider context--a debate about language. Omnipotence may be the overriding theme of the Chester cycle, but that hardly establishes it as a nominalist text.

While omnipotence is insufficient to establish the "nominalism" of Chester, is a concern with language enough to implicate the Wakefield Master material? In attempting to answer this question, this work first explores Ockham's ideas about language and then proceeds to examine certain

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[6]Quotations of Ockham's works will be referred to by source and by translation.

plays from four distinct perspectives. Three of these sections, delving into the way the Wakefield Master plays with the gap between apprehension and the articulation of that apprehension, explore the distinctions between language and the world. The final section is devoted to the redemption of language or the transubstantiation of language by the Divine, the divine *fiat* that restores the link between language and the world.

One point should be established before continuing: this essay seeks to unearth a similarity of thought between William of Ockham and the Wakefield Master, and not to conclude whether or not the Wakefield Master was a thoroughgoing Nominalist, a Franciscan monk, or any such thing. On the other hand, there is a definite possibility that the Wakefield Master encountered some of the theories of Ockham for, as A. C. Cawley points out, the "Wakefield playwright was no doubt a cleric or a man with clerical training" (Wakefield Pageants xxx). Still, this is not a study in biography, but a study in text. The text displays a propensity towards a certain way of thought, and this way of thought affords an interesting perspective on the plays. The examination confines itself to the plays in Cawley's The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle, which are now universally attributed to the Wakefield Master. Although material attributed to the Wakefield Master is found within other plays in the manuscript, such material will not be

considered as I believe that a modification or an addition to an already existing play is less indicative of the vision of the artist than a self-contained work. Before examining these plays, however, some consideration must be given to the thought of William of Ockham.

Chapter 1

Ockham, Words and Things

An essential feature of William of Ockham's discourse concerns the nature of language. For Ockham, to clarify the nature of language is to clarify many philosophical problems. Ockham's position on universals, for which he is most famous, establishes the role that language plays in his philosophy. Ockham's ideas about mental language and his theory of supposition both seek to clarify the relationship between language and the user of language, while his objective-existence theory, mental act theory, and epistemological realism all attempt to ascertain the relationship between the conceptualizer and the conceptualized. Ockham's ideas of the formation of concepts will also prove to be of some interest--particularly his position that God can cause evident assent of non-existent objects.

(1) On Universals

An understanding of Ockham's position about universals is critical if one is to understand how Ockham understands language--or what it is that language does. The problem of universals is, in short, whether any extramental reality corresponds to such universal terms as *humanity*, *sheep*, and so on.

Ultra-realism, very simply, states that to every word there is a thing which corresponds to it. Thus, when God creates out of *nothing*, *something* corresponds to *nothing*. To cite another example--when we speak about *humanity*, there is something real within every individual that corresponds to this concept of *humanity*. Words refer to the universal inherent in individuals. If words refer to the universal, then they are never without a referent. One ultra-realist, Fredegisius, "maintained that every name or term supposes a corresponding positive reality (e.g. Darkness or Nothing)" (Copleston, History Vol II. 140). Thus, if I talk about *sheep*, as the shepherds do in the *Prima Pastorum*, some real thing corresponds to my words or they would be without a referent. As ultra-realism seeks to preserve the objective nature of thought by maintaining a correspondence of word and thing, some extramental thing must correspond to the word sheep, or the statement would be meaningless. Consequently, to an ultra-realist the argument that ensues between the shepherds as to where to tend the sheep (*Prima* 101-37)[1] would not be completely absurd as language must refer to something extramental. They may only be arguing about universal "sheepness," but they are arguing about something. The problem, needless to say, is particularly

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[1]Quotations and references to the Wakefield Master plays will be referred to by line number.

vexed when dealing with drama, where the words establish the reality being portrayed.

While ultra-realism was not overly adhered to,[2] it did manage to produce an extreme nominalist reaction which is commonly dubbed "anti-realism," since it appears as more of a reaction than as an actual position. Generally attributed (though not without some debate) to Eric of Auxerre and Roscelin, this position states that "Only individuals exist" and "that universals are mere words" (Copleston, Medieval 70). It also asserts that "There are no extramentally existing universal realities corresponding to the names of qualities, species and genuses" (Copleston, Medieval 70). Universals simply refer to a state of mind, a mental content, or a human convention. In this case, words are independent of actual existence. Rather than refer, words represent or mean. To use an example from Roscelin, the word *part* is merely a word which is related to the concept of whole (Copleston, History Vol. II. 144). The reality is a plurality of substances to which our mind applies the term *part*. Intramentally or conventionally, the word is meaningful, but it does not refer to any extramental reality. If, in the play *Magnus Herodes*, Herod is called "kyng of kyngys" (37), the legitimacy for an anti-realist is

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[2]The most common examples cited are Fredegisius, certain writings of John Scotus Eriugena, Remigius of Auxerre, and Odo of Tournai. For a further discussion on ultra-realism see Copleston, History Vol. II. 136-55; Copleston, Medieval 68-70; McCord Adams, Vol. I. 3-12.

in the sense, not in the actuality of the case. The term *king* is a human convention which may mean but does not refer to any reality outside of the mind.

The position of St. Thomas Aquinas aptly summarizes moderate realism. Aquinas essentially asserts that universals do not exist outside of individuals. In other words, the universal exists in three ways: *ante rem* or in the mind of God (though not ontologically distinct from God); *in re* or individuated (which corresponds to the essence of the thing and is the objective basis for the universal); and *post rem* or in the human mind (which corresponds to our abstract universal concept) (Copleston, History Vol. II. 153-55). Aquinas attempts to establish a middle ground between Platonists who wish to assert the objective reality of the universal to the negation of the individual, and the extreme nominalists who seem to imply that the universal is merely an intramental concept which may or may not correspond to reality. For Aquinas, words both refer to a reality and represent a content of the mind. Roberto Pellerey, in an essay on "Natural Semiotics and the Epistemological Process," and Gordon Leff, in his book William of Ockham: The metamorphosis of scholastic discourse, both point out that for Aquinas the intellect knows only the universal directly (Pellerey 85-99, Leff 3-6). A universal refers to a mental content which has been abstracted from an individual reality, but this universal is

ontologically present in that individual. In the *Magnus Herodes*, when Herod is referred to as "kyng of kyngys" (37), for Aquinas there is an ontological reality which corresponds to this term. Its absence or presence in Herod establishes the validity of the term in its application.

Ockham reacts strongly to moderate realism, and instead argues that universals are nothing other than names (hence the term "nominalism"). Without delving into the intricacies of his reactions to moderate realism, which is mainly directed to the position articulated by Duns Scotus,[3] it should prove sufficient to state his three main objections to the claims of moderate realism.

The first objection is that particulars are logically independent of other particulars (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 67), and that no particular has anything common or universal as one of its constituents. This position, that only individuals exist, is probably the most well known of Ockham's positions and is something of a fundamental assertion of Ockham's, or a basic intuition. Its significance is that it leads Ockham to object to moderate realism (as moderate realism seems to imply otherwise). In the medieval context, however, the implications of his objection are much more far reaching than first appears. Among other things, Ockham eliminates quantity and relation from the realm of ontological reality (McCord Adams, Vol. I.

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[3]See McCord Adams, Vol. I. 13-69.

169-213; 215-85). Moderate realism understood both quantity and relation as realities independent from substance and accident. For example, in the eucharist, the substance of Christ enters the bread and the wine while the quantity of Christ remains in heaven. The accidents of the bread inhere in the quantity of the bread which remains. As for relations, it was feared that if one relegated relations to the realm of the mind, that is, made it a being of reason, it would imply that the effect only follows the cause if some individual is there to think about it. Obviously, some relations obtain independently of our thought. For example, a tree falls to the ground whether I think about this relation or not, but does this make the relation a distinct reality independent of the objects? Ockham asserts that only substances and accidents are real ontological realities and that relations are real only in the sense that they objectively obtain independently of our minds.

Ockham's second objection to moderate realism is that "nothing can individuate or be individuated by anything extrinsic to itself" (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 68). This constitutes the essence of Ockham's fundamental axiom of identity that a thing is identical with itself and different from everything else. If such were not the case, Ockham believes, one could not assert that a given individual is an individual. To quote Ockham,

> according to you, the humanity of Socrates is really distinct from the difference that contracts

> that humanity. Therefore, either it is really distinct of itself or through that contracting difference. Not through the contracting difference, since nothing is made distinct from *a* through *a* but rather is made the same as *a* through *a*. Therefore, this humanity is distinct from the contracting difference of itself. Therefore, these two are really distinct of themselves. But this is possible only if each is numerically one. Therefore, the humanity that is really distinct from the contracting difference is numerically one and numerically distinct of itself . . . (*Ord*. I, d.2, q.5; McCord Adams, Vol. I. 42).

Again, this is more of a fundamental intuition or opinion than an argument as such and does not seem compelling in and of itself. Ockham's application of his principle is simply more rigorous than that of most of his contemporaries.

The third objection to moderate realism is "that it is impossible for contradictories to be simultaneously true about one and the same being" (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 68). The reason that Ockham finds this third objection to be so potent is that he believes that if this were not the case we would have no criterion to discern real distinctions.

> For example, if 'Divine wisdom is formally divine wisdom and divine goodness is not formally divine wisdom' entails only 'Divine wisdom and divine goodness are formally distinct', then what reason is there to suppose that 'A man is rational and a donkey is not rational' entails 'A man is rational and a donkey is not rational' and not merely 'A man and a donkey are formally distinct'? And in general, what would bar the conclusion that everything is really one thing (*res*) within which many formalities can be distinguished? (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 49)

In other words, Ockham states that by allowing such a distinction we undermine a basic principle of thought and the simplest assertions prove to be problematic.

In comparing Aquinas and Ockham, one senses that Aquinas wants to preserve the direct relation between word and thing (or the "thingness" of the word) while Ockham wishes to posit a mind linking word and thing. While this might appear surprising, considering that Aquinas links words to concepts while Ockham links words to individual things, such is the case when one examines the role of conventional language for the two. For Aquinas, conventional language refers to universal concepts which have been abstracted from the ontologically real universals present in individuals. For Ockham, conventional language is subordinate to mental language which directly names individual things. At the level of mental language, there is a direct link with the individual thing, but conventional language is at one remove from the actual thing. In the Wakefield Master plays, the discrepancy between word and stage reality forces us back to the speakers or the minds linking conventional language to reality. Considering the plays as plays, the link between dramatic illusion and spiritual reality forces us back to the role of the audience as mediator.

While Ockham asserts that universals are nothing other than names, it is important to note that he does *not* endorse the notion that universals are merely conventions which are arbitrary and subjective (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 109-11). Ockham argues that while universals do not refer to any

distinct metaphysical reality, neither are they arbitrary and subjective. Ockham claims that universals denominate a relation of similarity and not a common nature. Similarity "is a two term relation between two things and not a three term relation between two things and a common nature" (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 111). It is not arbitrary because it is an "'intrinsic relation': i.e., one such that the existence of the relata is logically sufficient for the relation to obtain" (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 112). It is not subjective because similarity is a real relation, which means that it obtains independently of any mind comparing and contrasting things (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 112-14). It is important to note that Ockham's relations are intrinsic and are not independent realities. Relations between objects obtain whether or not I think about them, but the objects do not partake in some metaphysical reality such as similarity. This differs from moderate realism which asserts the metaphysical reality of relations. Ockham attempts to limit the ontological entities while not undermining the basis for objective thought. Thus, while Ockham asserts that universals are only names for concepts, he also asserts that those concepts are not dependent upon the human mind. To return to an earlier example, the title of "kyng of kyngys" (*Magnus* 37) would not be arbitrary for Ockham. The title refers to a mental concept which, in turn, is linked to an external reality. While Aquinas would

say that the objective quality of "king of kingness" is lacking in a Herod but is present in Christ, Ockham would simply state that Herod misrepresents the concept in applying the term to himself. In examining the play, one must decide whether the title, when applied to Herod, fails to refer to an intrinsic quality or whether it is simply misused language.

(2) Language and the Mind

To quote McCord Adams, Ockham "regards the mental language as semantically primary, in that spoken and mental words acquire significance by being conventionally related to concepts" (Vol. 1. 289). In Ockham's words,

> I say vocal words are signs subordinated to mental concepts or contents. By this I do not mean that if the word 'sign' is taken in its proper meaning, spoken words are properly and primarily signs of mental concepts; I rather mean that words are applied in order to signify the very same things which are signified by mental concepts. Hence the concept signifies something primarily and naturally, whilst the word signifies the same thing secondarily. (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 48)

This is important in terms of knowledge as "A real science is not about things, but about mental contents standing for things" (Prol. to *Expos. Physicorum*; Boehner 12). That these mental contents are distinct from conventional language is clear from such comments as "a layman who does not know Latin may hear many propositions in this language to which he gives neither assent nor dissent" (Prol. to *Ord.* Q. 1, N *sqq.*; Boehner 18-19). This comment, embedded in a discussion about apprehension and judgement, places the mind

as a mediator between conventional words and things. Conventional words are tied to the mental contents which refer to things. If one is not conversant in the conventional language, the appropriate contents are inaccessible. If the listener does not have an understanding of the conventional language, the words remain sounds and fail to convey the mental content. On the other hand, apart from mental content, words are but sounds and have no meaning.

Exactly how language signifies, or what it signifies, is an interesting and noteworthy concern within Ockham's philosophy. For Ockham, there are three types of terms which correspond to the conceived, the written and the spoken--

> A concept or mental impression signifies naturally whatever it does signify; a spoken or written term, on the other hand, does not signify anything except by free convention. From this follows another difference. We can change the designation of the spoken or written term at will, but the designation of the conceptual term is not to be changed at anybody's will. (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 48)

From this statement it is clear that conventional language, be it spoken or written, is distinct from the conceptual. While the conceptual is stable, the conventional is just that, conventional.

The significance of this distinction is clear when one considers the nature of conversation. While the conventional language may shift the use of a word, it does

not necessarily mean that the other language users are aware of this shift of meaning and may hold the earlier concept before their minds. To borrow an example from Ockham's Prologue to the *Expos. Physicorum*, I might use the word *dog* to mean "a star in the heavens" and proceed to tell you that I have two dogs. Before my mind the concept of a star appears and only my use of ordinary convention has changed. To the hearer, however, my use of the word *dog* will likely conjure an image of a barking beast. Thus, a shift in conventional language by one or more users of language can create a confusion in the conceptual realm. In the *Secunda Pastorum*, the character of Mak employs this shift after he steals the lamb from the shepherds. Mak uses the word *child* when talking about the lamb because he wants the shepherds to understand *child*. Mak is using language to deflect the thoughts of the shepherds. Similarly, in the *Mactacio Abel*, Cain uses the word *sleep* in speaking about death. The listener within the dramatic sphere may incorrectly infer that Abel is sleeping on the basis of Cain's use of language. In discourse, conventional language determines which concepts we consider, and, if language is manipulated, confusion can ensue.

Some mention of Ockham's understanding of *suppositio* should round out this discussion of Ockham's conception of language. A term can stand for various things in a proposition. It can represent the individual entity in a

proposition such as "a man is white," or "a man is walking."[4] This is what is known as personal supposition. A term can also have material supposition--standing for the term itself as term--as in the statement that "*man* is a noun" or "'man' is a written inscription."[5] A term can also have what is called simple supposition in sentences such as "man is a species" where the term stands for the mental content or universal sense. This threefold division creates numerous possibilities for equivocation and confusion at the level of conventional language, but what is even more startling is that Ockham projects this division onto the conceptual level of the mental language (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 348-51). Thus, even at the level of thought and concepts we can encounter confusion as to signification. As well, depending on the supposition, a statement can be either true or false. Ockham himself notes that

> For if, in the proposition 'Man is a species', 'man' has simple *suppositio*, the proposition is true; and if, in the proposition 'Man is not a species', the same term has personal *suppositio*, then this proposition likewise is true. (Prol. to *Expos. Physicorum*; Boehner 14)

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[4]These examples come from *SL* I, c.lxiii; Boehner 65-8.

[5]Modern writing conventions essentially eliminate the need to distinguish material supposition as it is already demarcated from the other senses of the word by italics or quotation marks. The conventions of medieval Latin did not have such convenient conventions of punctuation or typography.

The truth of a proposition depends on the use of the words being used. A shift in use can result in a shift in truth value.

(3) Conceptualizer and Conceptualized

It is perhaps accurate to call Ockham a logical nominalist but an epistemological realist, for he truly believes in a world of things with real relations. Thus, while Ockham eliminates a number of ontological entities, he does not exchange an extramental order for an intramental order of existence.

Ockham's epistemological realism has a direct bearing on how he tries to connect the realm of logic and language with the world of particular things that have real relations. Ockham first employed a theory of objective-existence to understand the relationship between the mind and the world and later exchanged it for a theory of mental acts.

The objective-existence theory postulates a mental entity[6] distinct from the real object intuited by mind. Philotheus Boehner describes Ockham's objective-existence theory in the following manner:

> the concept has no reality but only a logical being, as an object of the act of thinking (or, in medieval language, that it has no *esse subiectivum* but does have *esse obiectivum*). As a mere thought-object it has neither a spiritual, or

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[6]Realizing the confusing nature of the word *entity*, I hesitatingly use it nonetheless, hopefully adequately qualifying it by what follows.

> psychic, nor a material reality; it is something mentally imaged, and for that reason Ockham calls it a *fictum*. (Boehner xxix)

One can understand this in terms of the phenomenon of film. A movie is made of the real world, but in viewing it am I watching the real world or a movie? Ockham later rejects such a theory for precisely the reason that it places before the mind an object of thought which is distinct from the object intuited. For Ockham, this violates that direct realism in epistemology which he considers vital for genuine knowledge about the world. Ockham criticizes his early position by stating that

> such a *fictum* hinders the cognition of a thing. Therefore, *ficta* should not be assumed to explain cognition. Proof of the premiss: The *fictum* is neither the cognition nor the whiteness beyond the thing cognized nor both together, but some third thing that is a mean between the cognition and the thing. Therefore, if the *fictum* is understood, the mind-independent thing is not understood . . . (*Quod*. IV, q.35; McCord Adams, Vol. I. 85).

The objective-existence theory thus produces a third entity distinct from the mind and the mind-independent thing being cognized. One is reminded of the shepherds arguing about conceptual sheep in the *Prima Pastorum*--the *fictum* becomes as real as their surroundings. Ockham eventually abandoned this theory in favour of the mental act theory.

The mental act, or intellection, theory equates the concept with the act of cognition. As Boehner explains,

> the concept or universal involved in a cognition is identical with the very act of abstractive cognition, hence it is a psychical entity; this act of cognition, immediately caused by the object

> known and the intellect working together as two part-causes, represents the object, and as such can function as predicate in a mental proposition. (Boehner xxix)

The act of thought which abstracts the concept from the immediate intuition of the thing constitutes the concept. Ockham states that

> This cognition is called a state of mind, and it is capable of standing for this singular thing by its very nature. . . . Hence, just as the spoken word stands by convention for a thing, so the act of intellect, by its very nature, and without any convention, stands for the thing to which it refers. (*Expos. Periherm.*; Boehner 44)

The mental act of thought depends upon both the object's presence and the mind's apprehension of the object. Both the mind and the thing constitute the existence of the concept. A problem inherent in such a theory, however, is that it does not adequately account for the cognition of particulars. This results from the fact that as a mental quality, any concept "as such would be essentially more similar to any other concept than to any extramental substance or quality" (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 130). In other words, in similarity relationships, upon which universals are based, the concepts are more similar to other mental acts than they are to the extramental world. Thus, the possibility presents itself of a logical world developing independently of the real world. In short, while Ockham abandons the objective-existence theory because it fails to adequately account for the relationship between the concept

and the mind-independent thing, the mental-act theory is not without its own problems.

For Ockham the generation of concepts arises in his distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition. Intuitive cognition is simply cognition of a particular that is present to the cognizant individual. It is immediate and self-evident. Moreover, in the words of Boehner, "No knowledge of any kind is possible without a direct or indirect contact with some object that is experienced" (Boehner xxiv). Boehner describes abstractive cognition as "knowledge simply and solely of the object and [abstractive knowledge] therefore abstracts from its existence or non-existence" (xxv). Both are dependent upon some mind-independent object, but the latter deals with the concept as such and cannot assert the basic ontological reality or existence of the object. In the *Prima Pastorum*, when the third shepherd interrupts the argument over the non-existent sheep, he asks the first two shepherds, "where ar youre shepe, lo?" (135), bringing in the dimension of intuitive cognition.

Perhaps of greater interest in terms of the plays is the Ockhamist position about intuitive cognition where there is no object to be cognized. Ockham, holds that God

> has immediate and non-inferential cognition of everything, whether it exists or not. God knows immediately--and that is to say intuitively--not only all that exists, but also all that could exist, but does not. If such a cognition is

> possible to God, we must allow that it is possible absolutely speaking; therefore it cannot involve a contradiction. (Boehner xxvi)

In short, with the aid of God, what can potentially exist can be known with the same certainty as what really exists. Ockham insists that intuitive cognition of a non-existing thing can only occur through an act of God and that

> So far as natural causes are in question, an intuitive cognition cannot be caused or preserved if the object does not exist. The reason is this. A real effect cannot be caused, or brought from nothing into being, by that which is nothing. . . . Hence it is a contradiction that a chimera should be intuitively seen. (*Quod*. I, Q.vi; Boehner 25-6)

Nonetheless, it is not hard to see how Gilson can assert

> If God can conserve in us the intuition of something that is not actually existing, how shall we ever be sure that what we are perceiving as real is an actually existing thing? (McCord Adams, Vol. I. 588)

This debate about certainty and scepticism in nominalism is interesting not in that the ground for certainty has been removed, but in that the potentially true can be intuitively known. This possiblity is to me the far more interesting and bizarre consequence of Ockham's position and is important to my discussion of the feast in the *Prima Pastorum*, below.

(4) Summary

For Ockham, it is the individual thinking mind that is the key to the relationship of words and things. Reducing universals to mental concepts, he places the human mind as the link between language and the world. The theory of a

mental language distinct from conventional language appears to create a stability and objectivity to the spoken or written word, but it also poses problems as to the relationship between the mental and conventional. Both the objective existence theory and the mental act theory attempt to account for the relation between the intramental realm and the extramental realm. Ockham's approach is generally from the thing through to the concept and then to language; he does not seem to approach language first as we do in analyses of discourse and drama. Consequently, a gap appears to exist in the philosophy of Ockham between the verbal signifier and the signified which is unaccounted for. This potential rift between language and the world is something that the Wakefield Master exploits in several of his plays, and it is to the plays that we must now direct our attention.

The plays of the Wakefield Master continually drift into a web of confusion which is partly due to conventional language itself, partly due to the users of conventional language, and partly due to the speakers. If one examines the plays one will discover confusions which correspond to these causes of confusion. The simplest confusion of note is that of language which refers to no ontological reality outside of the mind. The second confusion of note is that of misnaming or misidentifying that which does exist outside of the mind. The third confusion is that of deliberately

misusing language to confuse or mislead. This third type of confusion frequently employs elements of the first two types in its attempts to mislead the listener. In the case of the third type, the intention of the speaker will be a necessary consideration.

Chapter 2

Language in Search of an Object: The Shepherd Plays

An old and still very present understanding of language accords a correspondence between word and thing. It was this assumption about language that led to the entire debate about universals, and it is this assumption that produces some delightful moments in the work of the Wakefield Master. As has been mentioned, Ockham holds that "the concept signifies something primarily and naturally, whilst the word signifies the same thing secondarily (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 48)." For Ockham, word and thing are linked purely by convention, whereas a realist argues that word and thing correspond to a mediating substance--the universal. The relationship between word and thing figures prominently in the Wakefield Master's shepherd plays where it serves to point to a referential gap which is both a source of humour and a source of hope.

The *Prima Pastorum* opens with two speakers independently bemoaning the state of the world. Their speeches seem to refer less to an extramental state of affairs, howevr, than to a conceptual realm. The first shepherd, while bemoaning the emptiness and vanity of existence, belies that emptiness by his very presence and actions. In his opening lines, reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 3, he states, "Lord, what thay ar weyll that hens ar past!"

(1), and goes on to explain that the dead are to be envied because they have escaped the vicissitudes of life--"For after oure play com sorows vnryde" (11). In his explication of the pattern of fate, the shepherd always ends on the negative--"When rychest is he, / Then comys pouerte" (15-6). Emptiness always triumphs over fullness and loss is the ultimate end of things. This same shepherd then states that he has lost his entire flock:

> All my shepe ar gone,
> I am not left oone,
> The rott has theym slone;
> Now beg I and borow. (24-7)

He also asserts that he is utterly destitute:

> my purs is bot wake,
> I haue nerehand nothyng to pay nor to take.
> I may syng
> With purs penneles . . . (30-3).

Yet, shortly thereafter, he decides to go to the fair to buy sheep (42-3). Exactly how he plans to accomplish this task in the light of his earlier comments is unclear. The audience is inclined to conclude either that there is some discrepancy between his words and the reality they are said to express, or that the man is seriously confused. While neither option is untenable, I find the former possibility to be the more probable. The act of going to the fair either belies or defies his earlier claims. At the very least it opens up a potential gap for hope to emerge.

Hope resides in the referential gap that the words create. The words are incongruous; they present opposing

possibilities or realities. The shepherd either has nothing or something. Stage presence is also incongruous--the audience sees that the shepherd has nothing, but they also observe the ostensible movement towards the fair. The audience at once observes an act of faith, experiences hope that something will happen and anticipates the *caritas* of the nativity. Poised between past and future, the audience is also the locus of hope. The audience is the mediator, the conceptualizer that links the world and conventional language. The audience also makes its own act of faith as audience. In spite of the words about nothingness and absence, the audience trusts that something will happen.

That hope resides in the referential gap, in the space between words and reality, is significant in that the referential gap is given a positive valuation. Rather than destabilizing knowledge or negating meaning, as a realist might fear, the gap points to the generation of new meaning. One reason a realist postulates the ontological existence of universals is the fear that meaning would be lost if intramental and extramental reality did not correspond or refer to the same object. The universal, present in the individual and in the mind, fills the gap between word and thing. Word is tied to the universal which is also present in the individual object. By negating the ontological status of the universal, and by relegating it to the intramental realm, Ockham appears to destabilize meaning.

Ockham holds that spoken and written language is at one remove from reality; it is by convention that words stand for things in propositions. The *Prima Pastorum* exposes a gap between the spoken and the stage reality, but, instead of negating meaning, this gap inspires movement and generates hope. Hope and faith require absence in order to be present; they anticipate. It is only when the words have no referent at hand, when they dwell in the conceptual, that faith and hope can emerge.

The story of Moll and a purported fertility miracle in the play increase the sense that language is not referring as a realist would have it. Within a speech by the third shepherd, a reference is made to the story of Moll,

> Ye brayde of Mowll that went by the way--
> Many shepe can she poll, bot oone had she ay.
> Bot she happynyd full fowll: hyr pycher, I say,
> Was broken.
> 'Ho, God!' she sayde;
> Bot oone shepe yit she hade.
> The mylk-pycher was layde;
> The skarthis was the tokyn. (153-60)

Gordon Hall Gerould, in his article "Moll of the *Prima Pastorum*," outlines a number of variants of the Moll legend. The story usually involves a young woman going to market carrying some milk in a pitcher. As she anticipates the sale of the milk, and the subsequent purchases and sales, the young woman forgets the reality of her situation and drops the container of milk. As Gerould points out, "oone shepe yit she hade" is an unusual emendation to the story (158). Jeffrey Helterman concludes that

> Here, and we are reminded of it twice, one sheep remains to her: "Many shepe can she poll, bot oone had she ay . . . / Bot oone shepe yit she hade" (154, 158). The sheep she is going to buy and shear are illusory. Nevertheless, unlike the first shepherd, who claims that he has no sheep left, Mowll still has one sheep even after "hyr . . . pycher . . . was broken" (155-56). In the context of this play, in which "to the lawde of this lam, syng we in syght" (501-2), there can be no question that this sheep refers to Christ.
> (Helterman 80)

This solitary sheep, be it metaphorical or literal, implies that the loss of the first shepherd may not be as total as he has made out in the opening of the play. Moll has lost much, but something remains constant throughout the story. The story implies that perhaps the tale of loss of the first shepherd does not exactly correspond to the reality of the situation.

This same ambiguity arises with the entrance of the boy and the miracle of the sheep. The boy replies[13] to the first shepherd's query about the welfare of the sheep that "Thay ar gryssed to the kne" (189). Considering that the sheep are all supposed to be dead of the rot, this is something more than a miracle if it is true. Either God has created something out of nothing, or the first shepherd has exaggerated or misrepresented his original situation. The inconsistency in the stories implies that a gap exists, be it intentional or unintentional, between the words of the

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[13]A. C. Cawley suggests that Iak Garcio may simply be a reference to the third shepherd (Cawley, "Iak Garcio ..." 169-72).

first shepherd and the reality they purport to represent. If intentional, the confusion exists at the level of conventional language; if unintentional, the confusion can be said to exist at the level of apprehension.[13] In other words, the first shepherd incorrectly denominates and either perpetrates what is false or accepts what he has incorrectly understood. In either case, the confusion exists at the conceptual level and relates to the correspondence of the actual and conceptual realms.

For the audience of the play, the verbal incongruities must be somewhat disconcerting. The audience relies on the characters, in this case the first shepherd, to tell the truth as the audience has no outside knowledge to contradict a given character. Language establishes the reality of the play; stage reality is largely verbal. If the words which establish the reality of the stage are revealed as deceptive--what sort of reality confronts the audience? The audience is forced into the gap between representation and represented.

The second shepherd laments the fate of humanity in much the same manner as the first shepherd, but the thrust of his argument, particularly in light of the first shepherd's comments, casts it in doubt. Instead of railing

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[13]In regards to lying, Ockham holds that "Lies are false *verba* in external speech alone, and in external speech, they are simply false because they are false signs" (Gelber 155). Simply put, lying occurs at the level of conventional language.

against fate, the second shepherd rails against "bosters and bragers" (55), "wryers and wragers" (58), and those who go about "as prowde a lord as he were, / With a hede lyke a clowde . . ." (64-5). In short, he rails against the deceivers--the people who misrepresent themselves in order to do mischief. The obvious problem, however, is to detect the perpetrators of deception. If language and appearance can mislead, what prevents the audience from falling into a scepticism about language itself? In other words, when can the audience trust language and appearance?

Even the speeches of the first and second shepherds serve to undermine one another. While the speeches in one sense complement one another and add to the sense of oppression, they also serve to undermine each other. The words of the first shepherd serve to diminish the impact of the second shepherd's speech. The first shepherd makes it clear that "when he syttys in pryde, / When it comys on assay is kesten downe wyde" (12-3). If such is the case, deception is self-deluding and, ultimately, meaningless. The complaint of the second shepherd, that the world is full of deception, in turn, casts doubt upon the legitimacy of the first shepherd's speech. The first shepherd's contention that the world is ruled by fate can either be a deceptive ruse on his part, or a genuinely held belief that is nonetheless false. The first shepherd implies that words hide a reality of emptiness and loss, while the second

shepherd implies that words deflect attention away from the world of reality. Once the gap between word and stage reality has been opened up, the audience has no ground of reference on which to stand. Instead of establishing or verifying some sort of extramental reality, the two speeches of the shepherds increase the audience's awareness of the gap between word and stage reality.

A similar pattern of speakers serving to establish an extramental reality is seen in the *Secunda Pastorum*, and has similar results. The *Secunda Pastorum* opens with soliloquies which seem to confirm (or create) an extramental reality much as in the *Prima Pastorum*. The incongruities in these opening speeches, as in those of the *Prima Pastorum*, indicate that gaps exist in the vision put before the audience by the shepherds.

The three shepherds begin their speeches by talking about the weather, but quickly shift the focus of their discussion to other concerns. The first shepherd opens the play with a relatively general statement--"Lord, what these weders ar cold!" (1) but subsequently shifts the focus of his talk to himself--"And I am yll happyd" (1). The weather, which begins the speech, is left aside and the focus is on the person caught in the weather--

> In stormes and tempest,
> Now in the eest, now in the west,
> Wo is hym has neuer rest
> Mydday nor morow! (6-9)

The shepherd goes on to vent his spleen against the "gentlery-men" (18) whom the shepherd identifies as the primary source of trouble. The second shepherd enters and likewise complains about the weather--

> Lord, thyse weders ar spytus, and the wyndys full kene,
> And the frostys so hydus thay water myn eeyne--
> No ly.
> Now in dry, now in wete,
> Now in snaw, now in slete,
> When my shone freys to my fete
> It is not all esy. (57-63)

The second shepherd quickly shifts to what he conceives to be the true source of hardship in life generally, and specifically in his own--marriage (64-108). The third shepherd, in turn, enters and talks about the weather--

> Was neuer syn Noe floode sich floodys seyn,
> Wyndys and ranys so rude, and stormes so keyn.
> (127-8)

The third shepherd is not given the opportunity to complain about anything but the weather, but, if he could, it is likely that he would complain about his servitude to the first and second shepherds--a topic implicit in much of the dialogue that follows. When he does greet the shepherds, he does not again refer to the weather, but asks for a drink and for some food. The discussion shifts to service and wages, and the first and second shepherds assume the role of oppressors.

In each case, the discussion begins with the weather but shifts to a discussion of service/bondage. That the weather has been strange has been pointed out by three

autonomous witnesses; all three shepherds mention it, and thus it would seem to be reliable information, something the audience can trust. Beyond that, however, the speeches identify different sources of suffering. The first shepherd casts the "gentlery" in the role of oppressor, while the second shepherd states that "Wo is hym is oure cok, / For he is in the shakyls" (71-2). The third shepherd, in turn, is oppressed by the first two shepherds. Instead of building on the themes of the others, the speeches appear to refer to some sort of truth, but seem to fall short in correctly identifying that truth.

In viewing a play, an audience brackets aspects of extramental reality (their own real world) in order to accept the verbally constructed stage reality. The corroboration of speeches allows language to "refer" without an actual referent. If stage reality is to exist at all, the audience must accept the validity of the world the shepherds verbally create unless forced to see it as fiction. In the case of the shepherd plays, however, the incongruities in language create a space; the audience is unsure what the stage reality really consists of. What is striking is that in these plays this space is where meaning resides and the referential gap is given a positive valuation. In the *Prima Pastorum* the gap creates a space for the revelation of the angels, while in the *Secunda*

Pastorum, the gap first creates a space for the entrance of Mak.

The entrance of Mak further complicates the picture in the *Secunda Pastorum*. According to a rare manuscript stage direction, Mak enters "*in clamide se super togam vestitus*" [with a cloak covering his tunic] (189. 1). In relation to the first shepherd's speech that "may he [the lord] gett a paynt slefe or a broche now-on-dayes" (28), Mak's attire severely hampers his credibility. In spite of his attire, Mak's claim that "ich be a yoman, I tell you, of the kyng . . ." (201) is quickly perceived as false by the shepherds. On one level, this seems to validate the shepherds' use of language, as all of the shepherds see through Mak's disguise. The problem, however, arises when Mak speaks. Verbal parallels between Mak's speeches and the shepherds' speeches serve to draw the audience's attention to the incongruities between language and stage reality.

Mak's presence simultaneously supports and undermines the various positions that the shepherds have taken. Mak first appears dressed as one of the "gentlery-men" or as one who oppresses. On the other hand, Mak's complaints about his wife (190-4)[14] seem to confirm the second shepherd's

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[14]The complaint is specifically about the "barnes" that his wife supplies in such abundant numbers, but I think the complaint is directed more at her fertility than at the children as such. This is supported by the fact that none of the numerous children actually appears in the play, although his wife, Gyll, does appear. The true object of his invective is his wife, and not his children.

complaints about marriage. As a result, Mak both confirms and negates the positions of the first two shepherds. If his appearance relates to the speech of the first shepherd, who complains of the oppressive gentry, Mak appears as an unreliable witness concerning the state of marriage. If, on the other hand, Mak correctly identifies the nature of marriage, he himself is portrayed as being in a sort of bondage which makes the position of the first shepherd somewhat hollow. By simultaneously supporting and undermining the shepherds' speeches, Mak increases the gap between word and reality and accentuates the conceptual realm. If the oppressor, or the one playing the part of the oppressor, is, in turn, oppressed, this speaks more about the general condition of humanity than it does about a certain oppressed class. Instead of separating and opposing the oppressor and the oppressed, the play links them. This movement towards linking Mak/oppressor with the third shepherd/oppressed is indicated by Mak's comment that "My belly farys not weyll; it is out of astate" (228). Both the third shepherd and Mak complain about the state of their bellies.

Noticeably absent from Mak's speech is any reference to the weather. That Mak fails to refer to that which everyone in the play has thus far referred, either casts doubt upon the referential quality of his words, or upon the words of the shepherds. Mak poses a problem in terms of the

referential property of the shepherds' words, and the presence of Mak threatens to deregulate the language of the shepherds. Is the language of the shepherds limited to the conceptual realm, or does it, in fact, refer to a reality outside of the mind? Is language only accurate insofar as it refers to that which exists independently of the self? That is, is language effective for weather reports, but ineffectual for describing the condition of humanity? Is the weather merely a reflection of the spirit of the shepherds or the condition of humanity? Is the speaker bound by his/her own involvement with the world, and does language reflect this bondage?

In both the *Prima* and *Secunda Pastorum*, the shepherds attempt to verify by their speeches that life is difficult, but fail to do even that as they confuse the issue by identifying conflicting sources for that difficulty. Instead of confirming that something extramental exists which the shepherds' words reflect or identify, one is left with speeches which point only to each other. Instead of creating a stage reality with words, the speeches reveal an absence of reference. The shepherds' actions and language[15] indicate that a gap exists, at least conceptually, between

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[15]Being able to label deception as deception implies that one can see through the words to the reality that lies underneath them. The fact that one is able to use such a word as *deception* refutes any thoroughgoing scepticism on one's part. The act of speaking indicates a general, if cautious, belief in language.

their words and their beliefs about the world. In the end, this gap that separates words, belief, and extramental reality proves to be the gap for confusion and grace.

The meeting of confusion and grace is no better expressed than in the *Prima Pastorum*. The confusion begins when the first and second shepherds argue about some non-existent, or potential, sheep. The argument is essentially one about the space for the sheep--

> Here shall thou none kepe.
> *primus pastor.* A, good sir, ho!
> Who am I?
> I wyll pasture my fe
> Wheresoeuer lykys me;
> Here shall thou theym se. (103-7)

The two shepherds proceed to give orders to the make-believe sheep, and violence threatens to erupt, when the third shepherd enters to ask "Yey, bot tell me, good, where ar youre shepe, lo?" (135). The argument, which begins as an argument about the potential space for potential sheep, shifts to an argument about jurisdiction over land for ostensibly real sheep--

> Drofe my shepe me before;
> He says not oone hore
> Shall pas by this way . . . (131-3).

The two shepherds become so caught up in the words and the concepts behind them that these concepts usurp the reality of the situation that confronts them. The merely potential becomes more real than the real and ideas usurp the role of experience. The shepherds have difficulty escaping the conceptual, potential realm of their words and almost end up

fighting each other over nothing. In this instance, the referential gap leads to confusion and does not lead to hope or faith. The conceptual or the mental content of their words fills the space where hope resides; the mind affirms as real what should not be affirmed as real. The entire scene parodies the realist position that universals, or words, correspond to something real.

The affirmation of the conceptual as real in the case of the fictitious sheep calls to mind the difference between nominalism and moderate realism on the issue of supposition. As has been mentioned, Ockham holds that in personal supposition "a term stands for the objects it signifies . . ." (*SL* I, c.lxiii; Boehner 65), while "Simple *suppositio* is that in which the term stands for a mental content, but is not used in its significative function (*SL* I, c.lxiii; Boehner 66). Moderate realism holds that "simple *suppositio* occurs when a term stands for the object it signifies" (*SL* I, c.lxiii; Boehner 67). The argument about the sheep occurs at the level of simple *suppositio*. For the nominalist, the absence of sheep keeps the discussion at the level of the conceptual, but for the moderate realist, the conceptual corresponds to the real. Thus, the illusion of the sheep, through the use of language, becomes more real than the stage reality that confronts the shepherds. The shepherds' moderate realist approach to the scene results in absurdity.

Ockham's early *fictum* theory accounts for the movement from the conceptual to the real in the minds of the shepherds--

> Fictions have being in the mind, but they do not exist independently, because in that case they would be real things and so a chimera and a goat-stag and so on would be real things. (*Ord*. D. II, Q. viii, prima redactio; Boehner 42)

In the play, the sheep do seem to take on an independent existence in the minds of the shepherds. The shepherds are deluded through their inability to distinguish between concept and thing. The world of the potential erupts on the world of the actual as the representation becomes more real to the perceiver than the object perceived.

The world of illusion, or of words without a corresponding object, again becomes prominent during the "feast" of the shepherds. Assuming that the feast is of words and not things, that is, that the shepherds are eating and drinking nothing, the play gives another perspective on the idea of *fictum* or on the conceptual realm. It seems unlikely that the literal feast that V. A. Kolve argues for (302-3, n. 67) took place on stage, and the position of Cawley ("Grotesque" 213-17), Margery Morgan (680-81), and Suzanne Speyser (13), that the action is to be mimed, seems more probable. Helterman's suggestion that the action involved simple fare of bread and ale (87) provides a nice bridge between mime and reality. The strength of Helterman's position, aside from the obvious eucharistic

resonances, becomes evident at the conclusion of the feast when the shepherds gather up the leftovers with the intention of giving them to the poor (281-86). Helterman's solution physically gives the shepherds something to do at this point in the play. Moreover, if the shepherds offer some of the bread to the audience at this point, the audience experiences a genuine act of charity. While faith and hope depend upon the absence of an object, charity requires an object to be present. The play has shifted from conventional language to physical reality.

Either having the scene mimed or having a simple fare of bread and ale demands that the audience recognize the discrepancy between word and visible reality in order to determine the status of the stage reality. Morgan points out the problem when she states that

> the notion that the *Prima Pastorum* feast was a make-believe of make-believe implies that a confidence trick was played on the audience. . . . What order of reality were they faced with here? (680-81)

In drama, it need not be dark for it to be night; one need not have food to eat. How is the audience to know that this feast is not a real feast when the words indicate that they are eating a wide array of foods? In the instance of the sheep, the audience is explicitly told that there are no sheep by a third party (although the boy later seems to indicate that there are sheep), but no character provides this service for the audience in the case of the feast. If

mimed, the actual presence or absence of food cannot be confirmed by physical stage presence or absence. A feast of bread and ale would pose a similar problem of signification. Does the food physically stand for the things being spoken about or does it only carry the significance of the foods eaten? In other words, does it remain bread or is it more? The audience must determine if the feast recollects the argument over the sheep or looks forward to the nativity, and whether there is actually nothing or something being described. The feast seems to function as something of a mediation between the fiction of the sheep and the reality of the Incarnation. As the ontological status of the feast is less than clear, the audience must determine whether the action represents absence or presence, and if that presence is symbolic or real.

Scholars have noted the possible significance of the foods "eaten" in the feast (Adams; Cawley, "Grotesque"; Lepow, "Cleansed"), but have failed to distinguish whether the significance of the feast is to be found on the symbolic or actual level. Both Robert Adams and Lauren Lepow point out that the feast contains items that violate the Levitical dietary code, while Cawley notes that the feast brings together the aristocratic and plebeian. Thus, the feast verbally brings together the New Law and the Old Law, the rich and the poor. Yet, the question remains as to whether the efficacy of the feast is at the symbolic or actual

level. What, for example, is the significance of pretending to eat unclean foods, which the audience would probably not have noticed, or the food of lords and commoners, which the audience might have noticed? Is the significance only figurative? Or does the symbol have the potency of the actual? Is the metaphor metamorphic?

The feast of the *Prima Pastorum* becomes more than a symbolic companionship as the effects are more than symbolic. As the belief in the *fictis* of the sheep brought discord, so the belief in the *ficto* of the feast brings concord. The words, which apparently correspond to nothing, induce a response which is real; the gap that earlier gave rise to hope now produces charity. The second shepherd states after the meal that "We will not brall" (280), while the third shepherd suggests that they gather up the scraps of the feast "For oure saules lett vs do / Poore men gyf it to" (283-4). The first shepherd picks up the suggestion of the second shepherd and states "Geder vp, lo, lo! / Ye hungre begers, frerys!" (285-6). The feast, though illusory, brings real concord to the group of shepherds which extends out to the community. The scene alludes to the multiplication of the loaves by Christ which, in turn, is emblematic of the eucharist. If staged with bread and ale, the allusion to both the multiplication of the loaves and the eucharist is both visible and verbal. As well, such staging brings a potency to the action of distribution

implied by the language of the play. Not surprisingly, the shepherds subsequently place themselves under the cross of Christ (290-5). The words are performative, not in an illocutionary sense, but in an instantiatory sense; the words induce a presence that is real.

The legitimacy of the *fictum* of the feast leads the audience to the heart of the world of Ockham. For Ockham, God is capable of producing directly what normally is done through secondary sources. As well, according to Ockham, God can produce an intuitive cognition of a non-existent entity. Consequently, what is non-existent can be just as "real" and efficacious as what is ontologically real. Without concluding that the shepherds are deluded by appearances, the meaning of the feast shifts from the symbolic to the real--at least on an existential plane of existence.

The *Prima Pastorum* uses the idea of apparently non-referential language both negatively and positively. In the first instance concerning the sheep, the absence of referents brings an absurdity to the whole argument. The basis of the argument is as illusory as the language that expresses it. In the feast, however, the illusion brings about charity among the participants. Although nothing corresponds to the words being spoken, the effect is tangibly experienced by the participants of the feast. The

fictum can prove to be either a source of confusion or a potential gate to religious truth in the play.

It is interesting that in both the first and the second shepherd plays the revelation of the angels arrives just as the shepherds submit themselves to sleep (*Prima* 287-95, *Secunda* 629-37). This signals a shift to the intramental world of dream and vision. For both the audience and for the characters, nothing could be more "real" or true than the revelation, which, ostensibly, is the point of the play. In both plays, the angels make sure to awaken the shepherds--"Herkyn, hyrdes! Awake!" (*Prima* 296) and "Ryse, hyrd-men heynd . . ." (*Secunda* 638). While their awakening seems to be a legitimization of the vision, the question arises in both plays as to the authenticity of the vision. In the *Prima Pastorum*, the first shepherd states that,

> Me thoght
> Oone scremyd on lowde;
> I suppose it was a clowde;
> In myn erys it sowde . . . (309-12).

The second shepherd quickly responds with "I say you certan, / For he spake to vs thre as he had bene a man. . . . We must seke hym, I you warne . . ." (314-15, 320). The third shepherd, however, after talking of the wonder of the vision, states, "As he sayde in a skreme-- / Or els that I dreme . . ." (328-9). Either the voice is real or they are caught up in the world of dream. The second shepherd seems to confirm the actual existence of the voice, but the third shepherd reiterates the other possibility to the audience.

In the *Secunda Pastorum*, a similar movement occurs after the first shepherd refers to the "qwant stevyn" (647) and the second shepherd states that "All the wod on a leuyn me thoght that he gard / Appere" (650-1). In this play, it is the third shepherd who confirms the authenticity of the vision when he states that "He spake of a barne / In Bedlem, I you warne" (652-3). The first shepherd refers to a voice, the second shepherd refers to the vision, while the third shepherd draws attention to the message. It is the internalizing of the vision, or the mental act of cognition, that makes the event significant. In both plays, the vision is more than a dream and exists independently of the minds of the shepherds. There is something intramental about the vision, however, and the references to dreams and thoughts draw the audience's attention to this cognitive participation of the shepherds.

It is in the recognition and acknowledgement of the vision that the vision becomes efficacious. This is consistent with Ockham's mental act theory which posits that the object and the intellect together constitute a cognition. As Ockham would affirm, the vision of the angels, though real, needs to be cognized in order to be meaningful. In fact, as Leff points out, Ockham even attributes this principle of cognition to angels in contrast with the typical notion that "angelic knowledge is

exclusively spiritual and owes nothing to material things . . ." (60):

> angels can gain intuitive knowledge from material and immaterial objects alike as partial cause. Second, they can have abstractive knowledge of things: first abstractive knowledge from intuitive knowledge with the object known intuitively as partial cause; second abstractive knowledge from a habit produced by first abstractive knowledge as partial cause in the absence of the object known. (60)

Cognition, be it human or angelic, is neither intramental, like a dream, nor is it strictly extramental.

The shepherd plays of the Wakefield Master draw the attention of the audience to the gaps between the spoken and the signified. Both the characters on the stage and the audience participating in the world being created by the play are caught in this gap. The words create a confusion, leaving a space for hope, charity, and finally faith. Through cognition, the shepherds interact with the stage reality that contains them and it is in cognition, the dwelling place of the shepherds, the space between conventional language and ontological reality, that hope, charity, and faith emerge. The gap between conventional language and the real which exists when one eliminates the presence of the universal, is the realm of the human.

Chapter 3

Language Derailed: the *Magnus Herodes*

The confusion that arises when language refers incorrectly, or refers to the wrong object, is exploited by the Wakefield Master. This misnaming results from a misapplication of convention or a shift in convention which results in confusion. As has been discussed, conventional language for Ockham is both subordinate to and autonomous of mental language. A mental concept signifies naturally while a spoken or written term signifies conventionally. The concept itself cannot be changed, but conventional language can change at will. In the Wakefield Master plays, the characters are caught up in the use of language and remain bound by the language. This can give rise to absurdities which are more apparent to the audience who possess a different frame of reference from which to derive understanding and meaning. The confusion which arises when language refers incorrectly is especially evident in the *Magnus Herodes*.

The *Magnus Herodes*, more than any other Wakefield Master play, capitalizes on displaced or misplaced references. For instance, throughout the play there is an attempt to displace the word *king* from its proper referent, Christ, and to displace the referentiality of "veniance." As well, the references to the breaking of bones throughout

the play serve to highlight the role of language in the play.

Many of the words used to describe Herod in the play are traditionally associated with the person of Jesus. The misappropriation of christological titles has been brought out by Wendy Clein in her article "The Towneley *Magnus Herodes* and the Comedy of Redemption." As Clein states: "the titles he [the messenger] bestows on Herod belong to Christ . . ." (57).[16] Her argument is that the apparent victory of Herod at the end of the play is undercut by the christological references. The audience is challenged to penetrate the illusion of victory, as "The true state of things cannot be seen until one passes from the illusory world of material things to the reality beyond the grave" (58). While sharing her opinion concerning the misappropriation of titles, I would argue that one passes from the illusory world of language with displaced referents to the physical reality of the world.

Early in the play Herod is described as "kyng of kyngys, kyndly I knowe, / Chefe lord of lordyngys, chefe leder of law" (37-8). This usurpation of a traditional title of Christ is both immediately recognizable and

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[16]J. W. Robinson, in his Studies in Fifteenth-Century Stagecraft, also notes this point in his chapter on "The York Play of the Slaughter of the Innocents and the Play of Herod the Great": "The herald unwittingly points to the absurdity of Herod's claims by praising him in inapplicable biblical terms . . ." (152).

subversive; it makes us aware of Herod's inadequacy as the bearer of the sign "kyng of kyngys." Ockham writes that

> 'sign' means that which makes us know something else, and either is able itself to stand for it, or can be added in a proposition to what is able to stand for something . . . (*SL* I, c. i; Boehner 49).

The name "kyng of kyngys" draws the mind of the audience to the traditional bearer of the title, Christ. Herod's use of this title draws the attention of the audience to the authentic but absent bearer of the title. When a title normally associated with Christ is used, or more particularly misused, Christ is present in a way that may be more powerful than if he were physically represented on the stage. In other words, Herod's attempt to appropriate the title draws the audience's attention to this act as misappropriation. The title bears with it an appropriate mental content which seems ill applied to the figure of Herod.

The play contains other examples of misapplied christological titles. The messenger who opens the play describes Herod as "the worthyest of all barnes that ar borne . . ." (55). Considering the play centres on the birth of a truly 'worthy' child, and the slaughter of others, it seems striking that this description is applied to Herod. The speech of the third soldier, "Hayll, heyndly! / Hayll, lord! Hayll, kyng!" (455-56), and the overtures of obeisance that pervade the play indicate a misplaced sense of devotion--the soldiers are serving the wrong king. These

titles seem more fitting in a shepherd play than they do in a play about the slaughter of innocent children.

In the play there is also an attempt to portray Herod's kingship as universal, again a displacement of the role of Christ as redeemer of all humanity. Herod is said to rule

> Tuskane and Turky,
> All Inde and Italy,
> Cecyll and Surry
> Drede hym and dowtys.
>
> From Paradyse to Padwa, to Mownt Flascon,
> From Egyp to Mantua, vnto Kemptowne,
> From Sarceny to Susa, to Grece it abowne,
> Both Normondy and Norwa lowtys to his crowne.
> (42-9)

Throughout this passage there is a link made between legendary east and historical/contemporary west and the alliteration serves to link the names of geographically distant places. Italy features quite prominently with "Tuskane," "Italy," "Cecyll," "Padwa," "Mownt Flascon," "Mantua," and "Sarceny" all being mentioned. As the plays can probably be dated within the first fifty years of the fifteenth century (Frampton "Flourishing"), Italy represents both modernity and the land that encompasses classical--and papal--Rome.[17] That the messenger fails to mention Rome by name is a conspicuous absence. In other words, Rome is never directly linked to Herod, but Italy is linked to

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[17]In this sense, Padua may be an allusion to Marsilius of Padua--famous for his diatribes against the papacy. Marsilius, like Ockham, found refuge with Ludwig of Bavaria, but Ockham strongly criticized the work of Marsilius. For more on Marsilius, see Copleston, History Vol. III. 168-80, and Medieval 292-313.

Herod. When combined with the earlier reference to Herod as "kyng of kyngys," the implication is that Herod is claiming lordship over spiritual and secular realms. "Turke," "Inde," and "Paradyse" are all located in the east--an east veiled in mystery and ruled by the enemies of the Church. Cawley notes that "*Susa* is the name of the capital of Prester John's legendary kingdom. . . . It is also the name of the ancient capital of Persia, and of a seaport in the north-east of Tunisia" (Wakefield Pageants 115). The mention of "Grece" again conjoins the classical and the contemporary as the discovery of the writings of Aristotle revolutionized the thought of Europe. Cawley points out that "Normandy and Norwa" appear in the alliterative *Morte Arthur* (line 44) (Wakefield Pageants 115) which links them with Britain's legendary past. If, with Cawley, "Kemptowne" refers to York and the bishop John Kemp(e) (Wakefield Pageants 115), there is reference to a contemporary British city and the institutional church. The jurisdiction of Herod's reign extends from the past to the present (future in terms of the historical time frame of the play), from the mythic and hidden east to the contemporary west, from the infidels to the Christian. The claim of the messenger implies an absolute secular rule for Herod which corresponds to the spiritual rule implicit in the title "kyng of kyngys." The totality of Herod's rule is reinforced when the messenger states that "His renowne / Can no tong tell, /

From heuen vnto hell . . ." (50-2). In the midst of this articulation of Herod's grandeur is a comment on the inadequacy of words as the audience is reminded that perhaps silence is more eloquent. In the midst of a storm of words the audience is made aware of the deficiency of language.

The importance of all this noise about Herod is that these words are trying to appropriate a position designated for Christ in the world of the play. It is Christ who is the universal king, whose "ronowne / Can no tong tell. . . ." The kingdom which Herod claims is none other than the one designated for the Christ child in the play. This movement of verbal usurpation on the part of Herod climaxes in the phrase, "in me standys lyfe and dede" (92). In the world of the play this is obviously a divine office and Herod is being portrayed as one who attempts to usurp the divine.

The question remains as to how language can effect such a displacement. To reiterate the position of Ockham,

> vocal words are signs subordinated to mental concepts or contents. . . . [W]ords are applied in order to signify the very same things which are signified by mental concepts. Hence the concept signifies something primarily and naturally, whilst the word signifies the same thing secondarily. This holds to such an extent that a word conventionally signifying an object signified by a mental concept would immediately, and without any new convention, come to signify another object, simply because the concept came to signify another object. (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 48)

In other words, if the concept shifts, the word automatically acquires a new meaning without a shift in

convention. This implies a stable link between word and concept; the word follows the concept like a dog on a leash. However, as has been noted,

> A concept or mental impression sigifies naturally whatever it does signify; a spoken or written term, on the other hand, does not signify anything except by free convention. . . . We can change the designation of the spoken or written term at will, but the designation of the conceptual term is not to be changed at anybody's will. (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 48)

While the concept remains stable, the words that represent it can change at will. When added to Ockham's comment that signs are that which make us know something else, that they point the mind in the direction of certain mental contents, the problem becomes clear. Words, for Ockham, are subordinate to mental concepts or else they would be mere sounds, but they are also purely conventional. I cannot change the concept but I can change the word that refers to the concept. Any receiver of the sign unable to recognize a shift in convention, or at the level of convention, is left with an incorrect concept.

While Herod uses and misuses words to build up his kingdom, it is words that threaten it. The messenger declares that "romoure is rasyd so, that boldly thay brade / Emangis thame: / Thay carp of a kyng . . ." (76-8). The tirades contained within this play are all triggered by a rumour, by noise. Noise begets noise and the audience never truly escapes the language of Herod in the play. In this

sense, Herod does triumph at the end of the play for his words control the play.

Herod's language, however, displaces itself when it counters the audience's experience and faith. At this point, one should take into account what Boehner interprets as the meaning of Ockham's famous "razor"--

> *We are not allowed to affirm a statement to be true or to maintain that a certain thing exists, unless we are forced to do so either by its self-evidence or by revelation or by experience or by a logical deduction from either a revealed truth or a proposition verified by observation.* (Boehner xx)

Self-evidence, revelation or experience constitute the criteria of truth. Herod's language counters both the experience and the faith of the audience in the play and the audience realizes that while Herod perceives the rumours of Christ as a threat to his word-built kingdom, Herod is but a rumour, a noise, in the silent presence of God.

As Clein mentions in her article on the play (59), Herod attempts to usurp the sense of the word "veniance" or vengeance. Vengeance is a word linked to both its cause and effect. A paradigmatic use of the word is found in the *Mactacio Abel*, when Abel cries out against Cain, "Veniance, veniance, Lord, I cry! / For I am slayn, and not gilty" (328-9). The word "veniance" points towards a crime and its ultimate retribution; it is a word that links past and future.

Herod unjustifiably cries out for retribution in an attempt to justify his subsequent actions and states that

My guttys will outt thryng
Bot I this lad hyng;
Withoutt I haue a vengyng,
I may lyf no langer. (240-3)

Herod casts himself in the role of the innocent victim, vows to "take veniance" (271), and bids his soldiers "Veniance shall ye take . . ." (303). Herod portrays himself as a victim and an upholder of justice and right, rather than as an oppressive and brutal murderer. The reference to "My guttys will outt thryng" (240) playfully alludes to the death of the other Herod (often conflated with the one in the play) in Acts 12.21-3. The Herod in Acts is punished because he did not refer the glory accorded him to God. Herod accepts the title of "god" and misappropriates the term. The passage also alludes to the death of Judas (Acts 1.18), the man who betrayed Jesus with a kiss, a sign of friendship. The allusions suggest that the Herod of the play will misuse language and convention, attempt to usurp the position of the divine and, ultimately, betray Christ.

It is the scene of the massacre and its aftermath which serves to undo any validity that the portrait of Herod as innocent victim might have in the mind of the audience. If the abstract concept of murdering innocent children is not offensive or disturbing enough, this play confronts the audience with the murders and the reactions of the mothers. Not surprisingly, all three mothers cry out for "veniance" (346, 66, 68, 91). While Herod attempts to paint himself as a victim through (mis)employing the term, the murders

confront the audience more directly with the concept that is conventionally tied to the word. The mothers, being the last to employ the word, are the last to define the term for the audience. Although the more legitimate cries for vengeance are not answered in the play, they draw attention to Herod's misapplication of the word. As well, Herod ceases to use the term "veniance" after the soldiers return. Herod has used "veniance" as a tool to justify the unjustifiable and the word serves as the efficient cause of the unsuccessful final end of destroying the Christ child. The absence of the word after Herod has ostensibly achieved his end heightens the audience's awareness of its previous (mis)use. The use of the word "veniance" in the play points to the discrepancy between conventional word and reality. Words, conventionally tied to reality, may be misapplied to that same reality. While Herod's use of the word "veniance" attempts to capitalize on this discrepancy between word and reality, the mothers' cries reveal the emptiness of Herod's use. Just as the rumour threatens the kingdom of Herod, so the correct use of the word "veniance" undermines the language upon which Herod's kingdom is built.

Herod's language also counters theological truth or revealed knowledge. Psalm 34.20 states that not one of his bones shall be broken ("Custodit Dominus omnia ossa eorum: Unum ex his non conteretur"), and the gospel of John interprets this text in terms of the crucifixion (Jn 19.36).

The frequent references to the breaking of bones in the play (63, 84, 108, 126, 144) calls to mind the biblical resonances of this phrase. Even when not directed at Christ, the phrase allows Christ, or the one whose bones shall not be broken, to be present. The phrase implies an emptiness in Herod's threat, an impotence in his power to bring it about. Herod's threats remain at the level of language and the phrase intimates his ultimate failure. Thus, even though Herod has the last word in the play and appears to triumph, his language undermines his authority and simply serves to reveal its vanity and emptiness.

Repression and displacement are central to the strategy of Herod. The messenger spells it out quite plainly:

> A kyng thay hym call, and that we deny;
> How shuld it so fall, greatt meruell haue I;
> Therfor ouer all shall I make a cry
> That ye busk not to brall nor lyke not to ly
> This tyde.
> Carpys of no kyng
> Bot Herode . . . (28-34).

Most of the play centres on Herod's desire and plan to negate these voices of dissent. In fact, he appears to fear the voices more than the child who bears the titles--"Trow ye a kyng as I will suffre theym to neuen / Any to haue mastry bot myself full euen?" (129-30). After attempting to negate the object, both verbally and physically, Herod places himself as the bearer of attributes. Robinson develops this idea when he comments that

> In the play in the Towneley collection Herod cannot bear the thought of Jesus being named or

> even existing. . . . He cannot bring himself to name Jesus, or even, as the play concludes, to utter the word "name," for which he substitutes the pronoun "it" . . . (171-72).

In short, there is an attempt to negate and repress which is followed by an attempt to usurp or displace.

The *Magnus Herodes* reveals the discrepancy between conventional language and the world that it represents. At one level, Herod appears to triumph through the misapplication of names. The play, however, consistently reveals the unconventionality of Herod's use and draws attention to the absent presence in the play. Herod's triumph remains at the level of language and does not correspond to the reality of the play. In the shepherd plays, the gap between conventional language and the world allows for the emergence of faith, hope, and charity; in the *Magnus Herodes*, truth, in the person of Christ, resides within the same gap as the displaced or absent referent.

Chapter 4

Language Misused

The Wakefield Master frequently employs the language of deception in his plays. Whereas the types of confusions discussed thus far involved a certain amount of self-deception--Herod apparently believes in his power--this third type involves a more full awareness on the part of the speaker. Deception occurs when characters, whether seen by the audience or only spoken of, use language deliberately to confuse the listener or to make him/her believe that something is the case when, in fact, it is not. Ockham's thoughts on lying follow from his distinction between mental and conventional language. Hester Gelber outlines this position in the article "I Cannot Tell a Lie: Hugh of Lawton's Critique of William of Ockham on Mental Language." As Gelber presents it,

> Augustine had asserted that when we lie, we willingly and knowingly hold a false proposition or *verbum* in place of the one we know to be true . . . . Ockham believed that Augustine must have meant an externalized spoken *verbum* rather than any sort of mental *verbum* when he used the term *verbum* to describe the false proposition of a lie. (154)

The only way that a lie can be said to enter mental language is if a false proposition is apprehended with or without adherence. If the false proposition is apprehended with adherence, then the speaker is unaware of the falsehood and is asserting what he or she holds to be true. If the false

proposition is apprehended without adherence, then one has yet to judge or accept the statement as true or false (Gelber 154-56). In either case, it is clear that for Ockham lying depends upon the distinction between conventional and mental language. Deliberate miscommunication features prominently in the Wakefield Master plays of the *Mactacio Abel*, *Secunda Pastorum*, and *Coliphizacio* and focuses on the distinction between mental and conventional language.

(1) Negating Presence: the *Mactacio Abel*

The *Mactacio Abel* features some interesting examples of deliberate miscommunication which depend upon their nature as language for their success as deception. Cain's counting, his attempts to deceive God about his crime, and his twisting of the curse of God constitute the prime examples of deliberate miscommunication in the play.

A few critics that have written about the *Mactacio Abel* have noted the importance of language in the play. John E. Bernbeck, in his 1963 article "Notes on the Towneley Cycle *Slaying of Abel*," points out that

> Good prayer, says St. Ambrose (199D-200F), is not only humble, but being well-ordered, does not need many words. To multiply words is to be sure of falling into sin and thus turning an occasion of grace into one of serious sin. (319)

Bernbeck's argument that sinners multiply words while saints stand in silence is reiterated by Stevens in the chapter "The Wakefield Cycle: The Playwright as Poet" (157), in his

book Four Middle English Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations.[18] Blair W. Boone, in the article, "The Skill of Cain in the English Mystery Cycles," essentially argues that the use and abuse of language is central to all Cain plays and that the dichotomy between spiritual versus material understanding of language is the critical element. While these critics all assert the dubiousness of language in the *Mactacio Abel*, none explains why language is dubious. Why should the good characters exercise caution when speaking? What is it about language that is being challenged?

Cain's unique method of counting, which negates the presence of much of what is being counted, depends, ultimately, upon the nature of language if it is to be successful as deception. Pollard's sidenote comments that Cain's "repetition of the numbers may mean that he counts 20 sheaves as 10, so as to pay a 20th instead of a 10th" (15). If Pollard is correct, Cain's stage actions negate the presence of half of what is being counted. Cawley's "stage directions" imply that something else is also happening during this scene. Just before Cain begins counting on line 192, Cawley writes "*Begins to count the first ten sheaves, reserving the best for himself.*" Beside line 219 ("We! this may we best mys"), Cawley writes, "*Chooses the first tithe-*

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[18]As mentioned in the introduction of the present work, this chapter of Stevens' is largely a reworking of his 1977 article "Language as Theme in the Wakefield Plays."

sheaf." Cawley interprets the counting scene more in terms of quality than in terms of sheer numbers. For Cawley, what is important is that Cain does not give a proper tenth, although he also admits that the counting itself might be somewhat awry--

> The medieval legends of Cain attempted to explain God's dissatisfaction with Cain's offering by making him offer God his worst produce, and not simply 'of the fruit of the ground' (Gen. iv. 3). The repetition of the numbers by Cain in 192 ff. probably means that he is busy selecting the best sheaves for himself as well as miscounting the sheaves in his own favour. Abel's reproof *thou tendys wrang, and of the warst* (224) is no doubt meant to include Cain's shameless arithmetic as well as his dishonesty in keeping the best sheaves for himself. (92)

Cawley also adds after line 228 the direction that Cain "*Finishes counting with his eyes closed.*" The interpretation of Cawley puts the stress on the nature of Abel's sacrifice--both its quality and quantity are lacking.

In the counting scene, Cain uses conventional language to conceal what is ostensibly present in the play. Cain begins his enumeration by counting two sheaves and then stating that "nawder of thise may I forgo" (192). After deciding that he would keep these two sheaves, Cain continues to count and does not acknowledge that he still has nothing to offer in sacrifice--"Two, two, now this is thre: / Yei, this also shall leif with me . . ." (194-5). Cain continues in this manner of counting and retaining what has been counted:

> Fyfe and sex, now this is sevyn;

> Bot this gettis neuer God of heuen.
> Nor none of thise foure, at my myght,
> Shall neuer com in Godys sight.
> Sevyn, sevyn, now this is aght . . . (206-10).

In essence, Cain counts only to negate. He has numbered eight sheaves, has likely overlooked many more, and has stated that none of these will be offered.

Cain's application of a single number on multiple objects misuses numerical convention. Cain takes advantage of the fact that the conventional word is subordinate to the mental concept. The assumption is that a certain numerical concept will be derived from the language used. That the concept associated with the conventional name does not correspond to the stage reality is the crux of the deception. In short, the intention is that the appellation will produce a concept which does not reflect the true state of affairs.

The selective negation of objects being counted enhances the deception. Comments such as "nawder of thise may I forgo" (193) and "Bot this gettys neuer God of heuen" (207) give rise to two possible interpretations. The first is the one Cawley favours and concerns the quality of the sacrifice--these sheaves are of too high a quality to offer in sacrifice. The other option concerns both the quality and the quantity of the offering. After being counted, the sheaves are negated because of their quality and the counting begins anew. This possibility is indicated by the lines "Nor none of thise foure, at my myght, / Shall neuer

com in Godys sight" (208-9) which follow the numbering of the seventh sheaf. These four sheaves are explicitly not included in the tithing, and this negation of a number of objects may pervade the entire scene.

Not surprisingly, Abel responds to Cain's method of counting by stating that "thou art not God betaght" (211). Through language (or the Word/Logos) God creates and, consequently, God's language is properly referential. Conventional language is also meant to refer to the ontologically real, to the creation of God. For Ockham in particular, a word stands in the stead of an ontologically real individual thing in a proposition. In terms of supposition, Ockham priorized personal supposition (where the word stands for the individual thing) over simple supposition (where the word stands for the mental content). In the play, as the sacrifice of the harvest acknowledges the gift of God, so language acknowledges the creation of God. God's language actualizes the merely potential, while human language conceptualizes the actual. When Cain uses language to negate the presence of real things, or to conceal their existence, language flounders at the conceptual level. The words retain their meaning, or simple supposition, but that meaning is undermined by the negation of the real or the absence of personal supposition. Cain offers the notion of sacrifice rather than actual sacrifice, and he does this physically and linguistically in the play.

Once again, the Wakefield Master confronts the audience with the distinction between the spoken signifier, the mental concept, and the signified. Instead of shifting the convention, Cain uses the convention in order to deceive. Ockham points out that a sign is "that which makes us know something else, and either is able itself to stand for it, or can be added in a proposition to what is able to stand for something . . ." (*SL* I, c. i; Boehner 49). When Cain counts, he removes the signified but not the signifier. That is, the signifier, in this case a number, continues to direct the mind towards a certain mental content, but the mental content misrepresents the actual situation.

Cain also attempts to use language to conceal the murder of Abel. The audience experiences an immediate shift in language following the statement "I the and thi life twyn" (325) for, in the subsequent line, Cain begins to use the imagery of sleep in describing Abel--"take thi rest" (326). Not surprisingly, it is Abel who states clearly "I am slayn, and not gilty" (329). Yet, shortly after Abel dies, Cain again states that "he is broght on slepe . . ." (336). When confronted by God as to the whereabouts of Abel, Cain replies that perhaps Abel is "somewhere fallen on slepyng" (348). Cain's use of *rest* and *sleep* to describe Abel's state is a deliberate attempt to deceive. The description of death as sleep is at once biblical (1 Cor. 15.21) and conventional. Cain hopes that sleep will be

understood literally and not metaphorically, and, in this sense, attempts to use convention to conceal the true state of affairs.

One could argue that the use of the word *sleep* is an attempt to understand the new phenomenon of death. Through metaphor Cain is attempting to describe what the term *death* signifies. While this is a definite possibility within the play, it is also important to note that in the process Cain is redefining sleep. The sleep that Cain introduces into the world of humanity is a sleep that negates rather than refreshes. Cain does not simply apply the mental content of the word sleep in an attempt to understand death; he reworks the word and, consequently, misuses it.

Cain's subtle attempts to conceal the truth is typified in his reply to God concerning the whereabouts of Abel--"I trow at hell, / At hell I trow he be . . ." (345-6). In this instance, Cain hopes to rely on personal convention and use of language to conceal the truth. Unlike his statement "fallen on slepyng," Cain hopes that his statement about hell will be understood metaphorically and not literally. In the world of the play Abel is literally in hell, as all who die must be until Christ harrows hell. Yet, Cain's constant references throughout the play to the "dwill" diminish the force of Cain's statement. From his previous use of language, one assumes that this is but another profane figure of speech. Cain's propensity for misusing

language allows him to speak the literal truth in such a way that it can conceal that truth. To emphasize the point, God does not acknowledge that Cain actually speaks the truth as to where Abel is. Even though Cain has, in fact, told God where Abel is, God correctly perceives that Cain is attempting to deceive through his use of language.

Cain manages to tell the truth and lie in the same breath. Ockham, as has been discussed, is very concerned with the link between the world, mental contents, and conventional language. Ockham's theory of truth, "that the subject and predicate should stand for the same thing" (*SL* II, c. ii.; Boehner 76), indicates the importance he places on the correspondence of word and extramental reality. In the case of the murder, Cain attempts to manipulate the conventional in order to direct God's attention away from the true state of affairs--that Abel is dead.

Cain's attempt to deceive is also highlighted by the proclamation scene with his servant (416-38). Cain distorts the intention of the language of God, and it is the distortion of Cain's proclamation by his own servant that reveals the emptiness of Cain's words. God, after confronting Cain and stating "I gif the my malison" (355), states that

> I will that no man other slo,
> For he that sloys the, yong or old,
> It shall be punyshid sevenfold. (371-73)

In his proclamation, Cain construes these latter words of God to mean,

> I commaund you in the kyngys nayme,
> That no man at thame fynd fawt ne blame,
> Nowther with hym nor with his knafe,
> For thay ar trew full manyfold.
> The kyng wrytys you vntill.
> The kyng will that thay be safe.
> At thare awne will let tham wafe.
> Loke no man say to theym, on nor other
> Byd euery man theym luf and lowt.
> (419-35, every other line only) [19]

Cain shifts the meaning of the interdiction against his execution into a positive avowal of divine protection for his person. After making this shift, Cain proceeds to elaborate reasons for this protection such as "thay are trew" (425). The statement, "Byd euery man thaym luf and lowt" (435), completes the shift and removes the meaning of God's declaration entirely. Unfortunately for Cain, his servant is just as unreliable in his use of language. Instead of crying out Cain's message, the boy mocks the speech and unravels the "ill spon weft" (436). The boy's asides mainly serve to bemoan his own lot as a servant, but they also serve to reveal the meaning of Cain's words. The boy reveals both the source of Cain's message--"in my masteres [name], fals Cayme . . ." (420), and the identity of Cain--"This same is he that slo his brother" (434). In this case, the boy's distortion of Cain's language serves to

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[19] I have only quoted every second line, omitting the interjections by Cain's servant, in an attempt to demonstrate how Cain misrepresents the case.

reveal what Cain's language seeks to conceal. Concerning the boy's revealing of the identity of Cain, Helterman argues that the boy

> violates the spirit of his agreement while holding to the letter. . . . By craftily finishing Cain's sentence Garcio lets the word out while grammatically supporting Cain's lie. (37)

Cain builds on the divine silences or gaps in language to construct deceptions, not directly negating the words of God, but misrepresenting them.[20] His servant then exposes the referential gap, and the truth obscured within that gap.

Cain's deliberate attempts to deceive depend upon the normal referential quality of the words that he uses. In miscounting, Cain assumes that God will believe the words and ignore their lack of referentiality. Likewise, in Cain's reply to God, Cain uses figurative and literal language literally and figuratively without indicating this use to God. Cain's distortion of his exile builds on the silence that encompasses words and creates a referentiality that does not exist outside of his words. The Wakefield Master, through the character of Cain, exhibits how language can be used to misrepresent and confuse. Language becomes the problematic in epistemology and presents a potential reality that may or may not correspond to the extramental world.

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[20]Even God's statement "I gif the my malison" (355) is not refuted, for Cain only states that his audience should love him, not that God should love him.

(2) Stealing a Metaphor: Mak

Over the years the *Secunda Pastorum* has produced an enormous volume of literature--most of which centres on Mak and the sheep-stealing episode. Scholars have documented countless possible sources and analogues of the tale (Baugh, Cook, Cosbey, Eaton, Gerould, Parrott, Smyser, Stroup, Wann, Whiting) and, since Homer A. Watt's influential 1940 essay, "The Dramatic Unity of the 'Secunda Pastorum,'" attention has focussed on the unity between the Mak episode and the nativity scene (Helterman, Mack, Manly, Marshall, Meyers, Morgan, Peel, Robinson, Roney, Ross, Taft, Thompson, Vaughan, Zumwalt). The structure of the play has been the anchor of virtually all of these articles. To cite one example, Homer Watt links Gyll's fertility and Mak's "dream" to the virgin birth and the prophetic texts, respectively. The key to Watt's argument is the role of music in the play which, he argues, punctuates and balances the play. Another example of this tendency towards structural arguments can be found in Stevens, who in arguing the importance of language in the Towneley collection also concerns himself with the structure of the play and attempts to demonstrate a situational and verbal coherence--unrest and noise are associated with the profane and peace and harmony with the virtuous ("Poet as Playwright" 175-6). In short, structure has dominated the criticism of the play.

The play, however, also affords wonderful examples of the deliberate misuse of language. Mak and Gyll attempt to confuse or mislead the shepherds through misrepresentation of the truth and to displace the real with the conceptual. David Mills captures this aspect when he writes that "Mak has created a dramatic space for himself, in which his own values can prevail" (101). God ultimately inverts Mak and Gyll's use of language in the play through the Incarnation, which serves to highlight Mak and Gyll's misuse of language.

Mak's first attempt at deception occurs with his entrance in the play. Mak tells the shepherds that

> What! ich be a yoman, I tell you, of the kyng,
> The self and the some, sond from a greatt lordyng,
> And sich.
> Fy on you! Goyth hence
> Out of my presence!
> I must haue reuerence.
> Why, who be ich? (201-07)

Not surprisingly, Mak's attempt to deceive centres on his use of language. Cawley notes in Appendix 4 to his edition that the use of "ich," "Goyth," and "ye doth" (213) all constitute obvious attempts at a Southern dialect. By using this false "Sothren tothe" (215), Mak the northerner tries to mask his identity from the shepherds. The attempt at deception in this case occurs at the level of conventional language. The speaker uses a dialect to conceal his identity and the audience is made aware of the sound, or material supposition of words. The deception only works if one considers both the words being spoken and the manner in

which they are delivered. It is in the combination of sound and sense that the illusion is perpetrated.

The episode of the stolen sheep brings to the fore the role that language plays in recognition. Mak deliberately misnames the sheep that he has stolen from the shepherds in order to deceive the shepherds. Mak and his wife, Gyll, design to give the impression that the stolen sheep is their newborn son. The nature of their plot is laid bare for the audience--

> Here shall we hym hyde, to thay be gone,
> In my credyll. Abyde! Lett me alone,
> And I shall lyg besyde in chylbed, and grone.
> *Mak*. Thou red,
> And I shall say thou was lyght
> Of a knaue-childe this nyght. (333-8)

The lamb is to be presented as their male-child (as opposed to the Christ child who is the lamb of God). Upon Mak's arousal from "sleep" by the shepherds, he talks of a "swevyn" (384) in which he sees the birth "of a yong lad / For to mend oure flok" (387-8) which parallels the biblical dream of Joseph (Matt. 1.20-24). Gyll subsequently intends to "swedyll hym [the sheep] right in my credyll" (432) and instructs Mak to "Sing 'lullay' thou shall, for I must grone . . ." (442). The deception of the sheep-stealing scene, which parallels and inverts the nativity, creates a displaced referent similar to the one in the *Magnus Herodes*. The Christ child, although physically absent at this point in the play, is present through the parallels between the

nativity and the sheep-stealing episode, and the biblical resonances of the deception insure its failure.

Mak's talk about a "swevyn" again removes the audience from the extramental to the intramental domain of existence. No one can contest whether or not Mak actually had this dream. The experience of dream is self-contained, although it, at times, refers outside of itself. This potential for outside referentiality is the motive behind Mak's talk of dreams. The world of dream shifts to the world of revelation and vision. This, of course, contrasts with the "true" revelation which is later experienced by the shepherds (638-46). In that case, the multiplicity of witnesses seems to verify the reality of the epiphany. In the case of Mak, the "dream" is confined to an audience of one. There appears little concern about the actual existence of the dream; the concern centres on its referentiality. Mak postulates a link between his thought and what actually exists and presents his language as a reflection of an extramental reality.

The masking of the true identity of the lamb, of course, links directly to the revelation of the baby Jesus. The misuse of language by Mak and Gyll deflects language, but their misuse of language undermines the deception. The Incarnation serves to restore the referential in language.

The entire Mak episode can of course be seen as a parody of the nativity (Helterman, Mack, Marshall, Ross,

(345-78) and a "vision" (384-97) which parallels the genuine sleep of the shepherds (637) and the genuine vision of the angel (638-46). Mak's statement that "a yong lad [is born]/ For to mend oure flok" (387-8) plays with the notion of sheep/shepherd. In this case, the sheep is presented as being both the *Agnus Dei* and the shepherd, the good shepherd, who will "mend oure flok." In the Incarnation, God becomes the good shepherd and the *Agnus Dei*. In other words, instead of the literal sheep as physical child and figurative shepherd, the literal child is figurative shepherd and lamb. In Mak's case, the order is reversed and the figurative becomes literal and the literal, figurative. Mak points with his language to the wrong object and inverts the meaning of the nativity (a meaning that is both prior to his own deception and, within the world of the play, still to come). The sheep is figurative child and shepherd, while the metaphor of the lamb is the literal reality. Lawrence J. Ross describes this as the "Comic literalization of the 'Lamb of God' . . ." (201). Mak attempts to displace language and the function of language for his own ends.

Mak's attempt to displace language is destined to fail because of its allusiveness. The parallels between the sheep-stealing scene and the nativity allow Christ to be present even though he is physically absent. In the *Magnus Herodes*, Christ, who is physically absent, is present in the play through the unconventionality of Herod's use of

play through the unconventionality of Herod's use of language. Herod's victory is consequently confined to conventional language. In the *Secunda Pastorum*, the absent presence of Christ also guarantees the failure of the deception. The nativity proper, in turn, reorients language to its correct referents. The title of shepherd and the metaphor of lamb return to the referent of the baby Jesus.

The oaths of Gyll and Mak to eat the "child" likewise depend on the displacement of language from its referents. Mak states that

> If I any shepe fott,
> Ayther cow or stott--
> And Gyll, my wyfe, rose nott
> Here syn she lade hir--
>
> As I am true and lele, to God here I pray
> That this be the fyrst mele that I shall ete this day (517-22).

Gyll echoes the sentiments in the lines "If euer I you begyld, / That I ete this chylde . . ." (536-7). The characters are referring to the literal lamb, but under the guise of speaking about a child. The lines resonate with the metaphor of the eucharist, where the physical child/figurative *Agnus Dei* will be physically consumed. Like Cain in the *Mactacio Abel*, Mak and Gyll tell the truth, but in such a way as to disguise the truth. The deception depends upon the displacement of meaning. Thus, Mak and Gyll misrepresent even when they speak the truth.

The shepherds' discovery of the lamb in the cradle heightens both the comedy and the attempts to misrepresent

what should be evident. Recognizing the mark on the sheep, the third shepherd states, "I know hym by the eere-marke; that is a good tokyn" (611). The response of Mak and Gyll is at once both strange and fascinating--

> *Mak*. I tell you, syrs, hark!--hys noyse was brokyn.
> Sythen told me a clerk that he was forspokyn.
> *1 Pastor*. This is a fals wark; I wold fayn be wrokyn.
> Gett wepyn!
> *Vxor*. He was takyn with an elfe,
> I saw it myself;
> When the clok stroke twelf
> Was he forshapyn. (612-19)

Considering that the third shepherd has just pointed out the tag on the ear, it seems rather strange that Mak suggests that the "child's" nose was broken. Mak may be simply addressing the first comment of the third shepherd that "He [the "child"] has a long snowte!" (585), and, in doing so, attempting to redirect the conversation to its initial point of departure. If Mak can control the conversation, it is possible that Mak can continue his misrepresentation of the true state of affairs. By continually displacing the language of the shepherds, Mak hopes to deflect the correct recognition of the lamb as lamb.

The ruse of Gyll again shifts the attention away from what is before the shepherds and invites them into the world of folktale, legend, and tradition. As in the ballad, "Thomas the Rhymer," where an individual is invited to take

the fairy path which is neither good nor evil,[21] the shepherds are invited to enter the domain of legend and belief. Instead of trusting their intuitive cognition, which is the simple apprehension of and assent or dissent granted to an object, the shepherds are encouraged to enter the realm of the miraculous, of the world that literature contains. In a play which is leading the audience to the miraculous, this invitation to an alternative miraculous environment is telling. In the Incarnation, what is to be affirmed is the presence of a child, to which they attribute the title of "sufferan sauyoure" (719). The child remains a child, the revelation concerns the identity of the child. In the case of Gyll's ruse, what is to be affirmed is that a lamb is a child is a lamb. The lamb remains a lamb but it is also not a lamb. The perception of a lamb is to be denied and replaced with a belief that this object is other than what it appears to be. At the same time, Gyll's story accounts for the perception of the lamb as lamb and, consequently, affirms the cognition. It involves more than an attribution of identity, for it entails a negation, or at least a reversal, of experience. Gyll asks the shepherds to accept her story (which, as story, is confined to the realm

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[21]The relevant verse runs as follows:

And see ye that yon bonny road
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the Road to Fair Elfland
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

(From Quiller-Couch, Arthur. The Oxford Book of Ballads. 1910; rpt. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966).

of abstractive cognition) and displace their own mental perception. By Ockham's thinking, without the intervention of God there can be no intuitive force to such a recognition. As he states,

> So far as natural causes are in question, an intuitive cognition cannot be caused or preserved if the object does not exist. The reason is this. A real effect cannot be caused, or brought from nothing into being, by that which is nothing. (*Quod.* VI, Q. vi; Boehner 26)

While the miraculous nature of the event may imply divine intervention, Gyll is clear enough in attributing the "miracle" to "an elfe" (616).

Of course, it must not be forgotten that the angels also invite the shepherds into the realm of the miraculous through their song. Language in both cases leads the shepherds to what can and cannot be affirmed cognitively. The difference between the angels' song and Gyll's story is one of efficient cause. In the natural sphere, an intuitive cognition cannot be granted to an object that does not exist. Through divine intervention, one can experience an intuitive cognition of a non-existent, as God can do without a secondary cause what is normally done through a secondary cause.

Both Gyll and Mak play a game where words are meant to displace experience. Words displace things and the audience is encouraged to negate the world confronting them and to enter a conceptual world of language.

(3) Word versus words: the *Coliphizacio*

In the *Coliphizacio*, the audience experiences a confrontation between the silent presence of the Word and the noisy emptiness of language. Caiphas, Annas, and the torturers attempt to distort, through language, the reality of the presence. Unfortunately for them, the figure of Christ refuses to partake in their language game and his silence threatens the construct of the oppressors.

The conflict in the *Coliphizacio* essentially depends on Ockham's distinction between mental and conventional language. Mental language apprehends the world directly, while conventional language is subordinate to mental language but also refers to the world. The Incarnate Word is the epitome of mental language as it cannot fail to refer. Ockham's understanding of the nature of the trinity brings out this aspect of the Incarnate Word. Gordon Leff, in describing Ockham's position, likens the position of the Son to the human act of intuitive cognition--

> God in knowing himself can be said to be the productive principle of the son who is distinguished from the father not . . . absolutely, but in being produced in total similarity to the father. . . . It [Ockham's explantation] is founded upon a comparison with the created intellect and will, where the intellect . . . from intuitive knowledge of an individual is able to form a mental likeness of what was previously known, so that if it could be reproduced outside the intellect it would be of the same nature as its object: that holds also if a concept is identified with an act of knowing. (433-34)

As words are said to stand for the things in propositions, so in the Incarnate Word there is an absolute coincidence of

word and thing. The second person of the trinity is the mental language of God's own self-understanding. In this case, Word and thing (God) are one and the same. Conventional language, on the other hand, is subject to change and is at one remove from reality.

Caiphas, Annas, and the torturers constitute the legal authority in this play. The thrust of their efforts in the play is to coerce or entice Christ to speak so that his words can be directed against him. The rulers desire to reduce the Word to the level of conventional language. The law, being built on the skilful manipulation of language, is threatened by the silence of Christ--as the silence confronts their empty words with a language of correspondence, a language that is performative and is directed towards the world.

Caiphas, a man of noise and threats, attempts to coerce the Word to speak. Caiphas' rantings are juxtaposed with the silence of Christ. After a short rant, Caiphas demands that Jesus speak--"Com nar and rowne in myn eeyr, / Or I shall ascry the" (134-35). Caiphas continues in his attempts to pry some word from the lips of Christ--"Oone worde myght thou speke . . ." (141); "Speke on oone word . . ." (145); "Speke on in a torde . . ." (148); "dar thou not speke for ferde?" (168); "Though thi lyppis be stokyn, yit myght thou say 'mom'"(172); and "Be it hole worde or brokyn, com owt with som . . ." (174). The failure of Caiphas

displays his impotence--his words have no force, they are noise. On the other side, the silence of Christ is more than silence, for, as the Incarnate Word, Christ embodies language. The silence is not the absence of words, but the living Word, the embodiment of language. The silence is not the negation of language, but the negation of the misuse of language.

The York Litsters' play of Christ's trial before Herod has a similar confrontation between the silence of the Word and the noise of his oppressors. Herod tries vainly to get Christ to speak:

> Do carpe on, carle, for Y can [th]e cure.
> Say, may [th]ou not here me? Oy man, arte
> [th]ou woode? (247-48)[22]

His sons also fail in their attempts to get Christ to speak:

> *III Filius* My lorde, [th]is faitour is so ferde
> in youre face here
> None aunswere in [th]is nede he nevyns you with
> none here.
> Do bewsher, for Beliall bloode and his bonys,
> Say somwhat--or it will waxe werre.
> *I Filius* Nay, we gete nou[gh]t one worde in
> [th]is wonys.
> *II Filius* Do crie we all on hym ot onys.
> *Al chylder* O[y]es! O[y]es! O[y]es!
> *Rex* O, [y]e make
> a foule noyse for [th]e nonys.
> *III Filius* Nedlyng my lorde, it is neuere [th]e
> nerre. (327-34)

The difference between the York play and Towneley play is that the York play contrasts the dignity of Christ with the ignominy of his accusors while the Wakefield Master play

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[22]Square brackets indicate phonetic alterations of spelling.

foregrounds the theme of manipulation of language on the part of Christ's accusors. In the York play, Christ's silence is perceived as a slight against the king's power and authority, while in the Wakefield Master play the concern is with condemnation.

Annas manipulates language and, unlike Caiphas, actually succeeds in enticing Christ to speak. Annas' approach is dramatically different than Caiphas'--

> For if ye thus thrett hym, he spekys not this day.
> Bot herys:
> Wold ye sesse and abyde,
> I shuld take hym on syde,
> And inquere of his pryde
> How he oure folke lerys. (220-25)

Annas is obsessed with the language game of the law and believes in it thoroughly--"the law will not he gang on no kyn wyse / Vndemyd" (229-30). Without the cooperation of Christ, however, the language game is undone; it is necessary that Christ speak--"Syr, ye may not hym dyng; no word yet he spake / That I wyst" (238-39).

The legal system in the play is built upon words--words of accusation, defense, absolution or condemnation. Jesus is taken into this language system and refuses to comply with the rules. Jesus does not raise a defense and, for the most part, refuses to speak at all. As a result, the torturers' accusations remain at the level of accusation, of language. Likewise, Caiphas' words amount to accusations and his investigation is ineffective as Jesus speaks not. Without the words of Jesus, his accusers are confronted with

the Word which they cannot manipulate. As in mental language, where the concept remains steadfast, so the Word remains steadfast. Neither Caiphas nor the torturers appear overly enthusiastic about keeping the legal game intact, for only Annas wants to play by the rules.

The silence of Christ undoes the law as it reveals its emptiness. The law depends upon a mental reality, a conceptual realm, which underlies the legal convention. Word triumphs over words as it reveals that the legal convention is empty and devoid of meaning. Caiphas betrays the formality of the trial when he begins his examination with the words "Harstow, harlott, of all? Of care may thou syng! / How durst thou the call aythere emperoure or kyng? / I do fy the!" (129-31). When Annas exhorts Caiphas to "Let vs do as the law will" (205), Caiphas replies "Nay, I myself shall hym kyll, / And murder with knokys" (206-7). The silence of Christ enrages Caiphas to the point that he regrets his learning (307-8) as it prevents him from physically striking Christ (310). Throughout the play Annas attempts to restrain Caiphas in order to maintain some semblance of legal convention. At the same time, Annas is also working towards the same end as Caiphas, only through legal channels. Annas, acknowledging that they have no power to put a man to death (269-70), manages to arrive at a plan to legally kill Jesus:

> *Anna.* Sir, take tent to my sawes:
> Men of temperall lawes,

> Thay may deme sich cause;
> And so may not we. (276-79)

If one law is insufficient, another should suffice. As the play ends, Caiphas betrays his fear that Pilate will allow Jesus to go free as "gyftys marres many man" (439). In short, the response of Caiphas and Annas to the silence of Jesus reveals the arbitrariness of their conventions. Their actions undermine their own language game as Christ's refusal to participate forces them to negate their own rules. Thus, while the oppressors appear to triumph, the play actually reveals the emptiness of their victory.

Chapter 5

Language Restored

The restoration of language centres on the intervention of the divine in human experience. Ockham's notions about transubstantiation will be particularly relevant here as they indicate how divine intervention occurs at the altar. Divine intervention, it should be noted, is infrequent in the Wakefield Master plays and is striking when it does occur. It is in the four plays which deal directly with the Incarnate Christ that a distinct movement towards the regeneration of language occurs.

Until now, I have ignored Ockham's position on transubstantiation. It is now important to see how the gaps between word and thing can be bridged having already established the discrepancy between language and things. Ockham's position on transubstantiation is significant in that it shows how language goes beyond the referential and actually transforms the world of experience.

Ockham departs from conventional thinking about transubstantiation at two points. The first point is his negation of quantity as a distinct entity and the second is his notion that there are two distinct steps involved in transubstantiation. The second, the two-step process of transubstantiation, is of relevance here. These two steps,

as outlined by Ockham, are annihilation and succession.[23] Ockham maintains that the substance of the bread is truly annihilated and is succeeded by the substance of Christ. Thus, Ockham rejects consubstantiation, displacement of substance, or conversion. The accidents, following the act of transubstantiation, according to Ockham's theory, inhere in nothing.

Several of the Wakefield Master Plays, present their audience a similar two-step pattern of annihilation and succession. It is especially notable in the plays in which Christ figures, but it is also present in the Noah play.

In the *Processus Noe cum Filiis*, harmony between Noah and his wife neatly corresponds to and succeeds the act of divine annihilation of the planet. The fighting between Noah and his wife begins early in the play and continues even after they enter the ark. The turning point in the fighting comes after the three sons urge them to stop fighting (415-17). Typically, Noah answers for both of them and declares:

> We will do as ye bid vs; we will no more be wroth,
> Dere barnes.
> Now to the helme will I hent,
> And to my ship tent. (418-23)

It is interesting that Noah speaks for both of them regarding their relationship but uses the singular

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[23]For a fuller exposition of Ockham's position on the eucharist, see Buescher, Gabriel, OFM, The Eucharistic Teaching of William Ockham.

possessive when referring to the ship. At this point, even though the words indicate some move towards reconciliation and harmony, the audience awaits the response of Noah's wife before accepting this declaration of truce. Somewhat surprisingly (maybe she is not listening), the wife does not challenge Noah but instead directs the audience's attention to the world outside of the ark--"I se on the firmament, / Me thynk, the seven starnes" (422-3). This text is unbiblical to say the least and is somewhat strange. How can she see the stars if it is overcast and raining? The addition is not so strange, however, when one considers that as the nine choirs of angels correspond to the nine orders in the church, so the seven planets correspond to the seven sacraments. With the annihilation of the world comes a symbol of the sacraments. Noah responds by stating that "This is a grete flood . . ." (424) to which his wife replies "We ar in grete drede; / Thise wawghes ar so wode" (425-6). It is at this point that both Noah (426) and his wife (432) ask God for help, and it is at this point that a new harmony enters the play. Immediately Noah turns to his wife and asks her "Wife, tent the ster-tre, and I shall asay / The depnes of the see that we bere, if I may" (433-4). The wife responds genially: "That shall I do ful wysely. Now go thi way . . ." (435). At one point, Noah attempts to steer the ship, but the force of the flood thrusts upon him an understanding of their helplessness. After calling upon

God for aid, the two are able to co-exist and work together. After the flood subsides, they land on the "hyllys of Armonye" (466)--that is, Armenia, but with a possible pun on harmony. With the annihilation of the world comes a corresponding annihilation of the friction that has marked the play to this point. After the annihilation, the audience experiences the succession of harmony and order in the play.

Why is there no rainbow in this play and why does God not return to close the play? These two features are probably the most dramatic departures from the biblical text and from other English plays on the subject. The play lingers on the destruction:

> Nowder cart ne plogh
> Is left, as I weyn, nowder tre then bogh,
> Ne other thyng,
> Bot all is away . . . (534-38).

In the biblical story, God repents of the destruction (Gen. 8.21) for the same reason that God initiates the destruction. The rainbow is a sign of God's change in attitude towards humanity as God vows never to destroy the world by flood again (Gen. 9.11-17). In this play there is no sign of change and no indication that God's attitude has softened towards humanity. There is only silence. There is also the new harmony that exists between Noah and his wife. Silence, as will be seen in the other Wakefield Master plays, is a powerful indication of divine presence, of the presence of the Word. The presence of harmony in the midst

of destruction indicates that the presence of the divine is independent of the accidents that surround it. The world is not, has been undone, and yet appears before Noah and his family. What has changed is the harmony and order that exists between Noah and his wife. The rainbow is negated in the play because the world has not changed and has changed utterly. Like the eucharist, the appearances are the same, but its substance has been transformed.

There is another possible reason for the omission of the rainbow and involves the distinction between mental and conventional language. A rainbow, for Ockham, would be a natural sign in the same manner that "a barrel-hoop signifies the wine in the inn" (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 49). It calls to mind a concept already contained therein. This is the general sense of a natural sign and "it only makes us know something actually which we already know habitually. In this manner, a word is a natural sign" (*SL* I, c.i; Boehner 49). The Wakefield Master frequently employs this sense of the word *sign* to portray confusion or deception. When concepts are derived from words (natural signs in the general sense), confusion reigns. This occurs in the *Prima Pastorum* in the argument over the non-existent sheep. The word *sheep* is a sign of something which is not there. The divine use of language more typically corresponds with Ockhamist mental language as its veracity and correspondence with the world is unquestionable. Conventional language is

at one remove from reality and is subordinate to mental language. The rainbow is not present, nor is the divine retraction, because they would introduce a linguistic practice alien to God as portrayed by the Wakefield Master.

At this point something should be said about the silence and apparent absence of God in these plays. In the Noah play, God speaks more than he does in any other Wakefield Master play. The focus of God's speech in this play is the evil of humanity and the plan of destruction and Noah's exemption from the plan. God's voice is a voice of judgement. In the *Mactacio Abel*, God speaks only to reprove and judge Cain. God does not speak to Abel. The only other directly divine speech in the Wakefield Master plays comes from Jesus in the *Coliphizacio*, when he says,

> So thou says by thy steuen,
> And right so I am;
> For after this shall thu se when that I do com downe
> In brightnes on he, in clowdys from abone. (251-4)

Although based on the biblical account, the speech is striking for its apocalyptic overtones. The language is even reminiscent of the language of God describing the flood--"With floodys that from abone shal fall . . ." (146). When God employs language in the plays, it is to judge, to act. For God, to speak is to act. Language instantiates being, as in the initial act of creation ("Dixitque Deus: Fiat lux. Et facta est lux." Gen. 1.3).

On the other hand, silence accompanies presence in the plays. In the two shepherd plays, the shepherds encounter the silent Word made flesh. God does not speak but could hardly be more present than at the nativity scene. In the *Magnus Herodes*, the noise of a Herod is contrasted with the silent absence/presence of the Christ child. Herod speaks endlessly in this play, but the silence triumphs as his words are stripped of their force and are shown to be hollow. Christ is very much present in the play even though he never appears--his presence is evoked in the minds of the audience by the words of a ranting Herod. The *Coliphizacio* brings this to the fore as Christ remains the silent presence on the stage. The silent, incarnate Word visibly confronts the rantings and machinations of the manipulators of language. In the plays of the Wakefield Master, silence is typically indicative of divine presence in one form or another.

In the *Prima Pastorum*, the movement of annihilation to the succession of presence is experienced in a different sense. In this play, there is less an an*nihil*ation of something as a confirmation of *nihil*ity. The first shepherd begins with a lament on the vicissitudes of life that is reminiscent of the book of Ecclesiastes,

> Now in hart, now in heyll, now in weytt, now in blast;
> Now in care,
> Now in comforth agane;
> Now in fayre, now in rane;
> Now in hart full fane,

And after full sare.

Thus this warld, as I say, farys on ylk syde,
For after oure play com sorows vnryde . . . (4-11).

The play progresses to an argument about some non-existent sheep, and then moves onto a non-existent feast. Illusion and absence permeate this play[24] until the shepherds succumb to sleep--a negation of consciousness or awareness of the outside world. As they lay down to sleep, they call on the name of God--

Cryst-crosse, benedyght eest and west--
For drede.
Iesus onazorus
Crucyefixus,
Morcus, Andreus,
God be oure spede! (290-95)

At this point, the play turns to the announcement of the presence of Christ and the nativity scene proper. Presence succeeds absence in this play as Christ succeeds the illusions that precede his entrance.

The *Secunda Pastorum* neatly falls into the pattern of annihilation/succession in the characters of Mak and Gyll. With the tossing of Mak, the misadventures that have thus far marked the play disappear.[25] Mak and Gyll disappear from the play, only to reappear as Mary and Joseph (see note

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[24]In this light, it seems pertinent to draw attention to the comment "also helpars / Is none here" (94-5).

[25]With Chidamian's contention that the tossing recalls a birthing practice (186-90), we meld the Johannine tradition of re-birth in the spirit with the visible elimination of Mak. If one follows Maynard Mack Jr., and Mak doubles either as an angel or Joseph, the imagery is all the more profound (83).

Yet, the appearances remain, the accidents stand; only the substance changes.

One might note that there are two sleep scenes in the *Secunda Pastorum* as opposed to the one in the *Prima Pastorum*. If the sleep scene in the *Prima Pastorum* leads to beatitude and presence, why does the parallel scene in the *Secunda Pastorum* lead to theft/absence? The answer lies in the referential gap discussed earlier. I argued that the gap prepares the shepherds for the nativity in the *Prima Pastorum*, but anticipates the entrance of Mak in the *Secunda*. Mak enters the referential gap to offer his own deceptions and illusions, but these are ultimately exposed, and replaced by truth in the person of the Christ child--the real lamb of God.

In the *Magnus Herodes*, the audience encounters an attempt at reverse transubstantiation. Herod attempts to annihilate and usurp the position of the Christ child. His failure, implicit throughout the play, is, nonetheless, never made explicit. The appearance remains, but remains appearance. Herod has not the power to bring about the transubstantiative act, for it remains only in the realm of the divine to bring it about. By playing with the idea of transubstantiation, Herod becomes both more threatening and more impotent. He becomes more threatening in what he attempts to do, and less threatening in light of his ultimate failure.

The movement from emptiness to fullness, from absence to presence, pervades the work of the Wakefield Master. This movement in turn points to Ockham's theology about the eucharist. The referential gap points to a reality that encompasses language--the Incarnate Word. This presence in turn transforms language until it has regained its significative function.

Conclusion

In looking at language, the question remains "to what do the words refer?" Drama constitutes its own reality through language which, in turn, somehow reflects on another, larger, extramental reality. In the case of the Wakefield Master, does the world that language creates accurately reflect the world? Or does language lure us into the wilderness of the conceptual only to abandon us to our intramental realities?

In looking at Ockham, I focussed on the relationships between language, the user of language, and the extramental object. It was seen that Ockham reduces universals to names which are the result of a concept formed in the mind and not from a recognition of something inherent in an individual thing. Only individual things exist for Ockham, and this is the guiding principle for much of his thought. Ockham goes on to make an important distinction between mental language and conventional language and subordinates the latter to the former. Mental language signifies naturally while spoken and written language signify conventionally. Also important for this study was the relationship of the mind to the mind-independent object, and Ockham's belief that God can cause evident consent of a non-existent object. Ockham's approach is generally from the object through to the concept and then to spoken or written language. The Wakefield Master

focusses particularly on the distinction between conventional and mental language and the discrepancy between word and thing.

With the shepherd plays, the concern was the absence of a referent. The plays lead the audience on an adventure in non-reference through the denomination of nothing. The referential gap between word and reality allows for the positive generation of meaning.

The *Magnus Herodes* proved to be a study in the miscarriage of reference. In this play, the attempt to destroy Christ is accompanied by a corresponding displacement of language. The apparent victory of Herod is undermined by the language of the play which allows Christ to be present even in absence.

The *Mactacio Abel*, the *Secunda Pastorum* and the *Coliphizacio* proved significant for the deliberate misuse of language in the plays. Language is used to deceive in these plays as characters attempt to capitalize on the discrepancy between conventional and mental language.

Ockham's theory of the eucharist, that of annihilation followed by succession, was seen to follow the movement of several Wakefield Master plays. Language transforms the world as presence succeeds annihilation.

Whether or not the Wakefield Master knew the work of Ockham is purely speculative. It is not unreasonable, however, to assume that the Ockhamist milieu influenced and

affected the Wakefield Master. His fascination with language, and how that language works in his plays makes the speculative gesture tempting.

Many other aspects of Ockham's philosophy and theology could have been explored in the plays--the role of the will, predestination and foreknowledge, the omnipotence of God, the moral theory of the late-medieval Franciscans, the relationship with moderate realism, and so on. Time and space has necessarily limited the focus of this essay to the aspect of language.

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